DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 830 CG 023 199

TITLE Why Are Employees Leaving the Federal Government? Results of an Exit Survey. A Report to the President and the Congress of the United States. A Special Study.

INSTITUTION Merit Systems Protection Board, Washington, D.C.

PUB DATE May 90

NOTE 67p.

PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Employee Attitudes; *Employment Patterns; Employment Statistics; *Federal Government; *Labor Turnover; Occupational Surveys

ABSTRACT

The success of virtually every endeavor of the Federal Government depends on the skills, abilities, and motivations of its work force. Yet recent years have seen increasing concern about the quality of the Federal work force and the Government's ability to retain its most capable employees. In any given year, the Government loses nearly 120,000 full-time, permanent, white-collar employees. Knowing about the reasons for leaving is an important first step in developing policies or programs that will help the Government retain its best employees and enhance the overall quality of the Federal work force. This report provides some insight into why employees leave the Federal public service. It looks at what factors influence the decision to leave, and whether the decision to leave varies by their workplace, age, occupation, or level of pay. Of special interest to educators are Table E3: "Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents with Different Levels of Education", Table F3: "Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents with Different Levels of Education", and Figure 4: "Most Important Reasons for Resigning: According to Education Level." The primary sources of information for this report were responses to a special exit survey developed by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) and completed by nearly 2,800 Federal employees who left full-time, permanent, white-collar positions during a 3-month period in 1989. (LLL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

A SPECIAL STUDY

ED329830

WHY ARE EMPLOYEES LEAVING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

Results of an Exit Survey

CG0231199

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A Report to the President
and the Congress of the United States
by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

THE CHAIRMAN

U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD
1120 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20419

May 1990

Sirs:

In accordance with the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, it is my honor to submit this U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board report titled "Why Are Employees Leaving the Federal Government? Results of an Exit Survey."

While an earlier Board report (issued August 23, 1989) described *who* was leaving, this report provides insights into *why* employees leave. The report examines not only why white-collar employees resign but also why they retire and how the reasons for leaving vary for different groups of employees.

I think you will find this report useful as you consider issues regarding the retention of valued Federal employees. The results of the exit survey conducted for this study clearly indicate that for many employees monetary concerns played an important role in their decisions to leave the Government. However, nonmonetary issues also have a substantial influence.

The information in this report may be particularly helpful in defining potential problem areas and in pinpointing personnel management issues to be addressed by Federal policymakers and managers.

Respectfully,

Daniel R. Levinson

Daniel R. Levinson

The President
The President of the Senate
The Speaker of the House of Representatives

Washington, DC

The Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution 1787-1987

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

DANIEL R. LEVINSON, *Chairman*

MARIA L. JOHNSON, *Vice Chairman*

Lucretia F. Myers, *Executive Director*

Office of Policy and Evaluation

Evangeline W. Swift, *Director*

John M. Palguta, *Deputy Director*

Frederick L. Foley, *Project Supervisor*

Paul van Rijn, Ph.D., *Project Manager*

CONTENTS

	Page
OVERVIEW	vii
Summary of General Findings	vii
Why Employees Resigned	viii
Why Employees Retired	ix
Conclusions and Recommendations	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
APPROACH	5
Sources of Information	5
Distribution Procedures	5
Response Rate	5
Sampling Procedures	7
Interpretation of the Survey Findings	7
GENERAL FINDINGS	8
How Many Reasons Were Important in the Decisions to Leave?	8
Did We Overlook Any Important Reasons for Leaving?	8
RESIGNATIONS	9
Who Resigned?	9
Why Did Federal Employees Resign?	10
Different Groups of Employees Resign for Different Reasons	13
Implications of the Reasons for Resigning	20
RETIREMENTS	23
Who Retired?	23
Why Did Federal Employees Retire?	24
Different Groups of Employees Retire for Different Reasons	27
Implications of the Reasons for Retiring	29
CONCLUSIONS	31
APPENDIXES	
A. The MSPB Exit Survey	32
B. Federal Departments and Agencies Participating in the Survey	40
C. Characteristics of Survey Respondents	41
D. Importance Ratings: Reasons for Resigning and Retiring	42
E. Reasons for Resigning: Differences by Selected Groups	45
F. Reasons for Retiring: Differences by Selected Groups	50

CONTENTS

Page

TABLES

1. Comparisons of the Survey Respondents With All Separations During the Third Quarter of 1989 and During All of 1987 6
2. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Grouped by Issue Area 11
3. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents with Different Performance Appraisal Ratings 14
4. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Grouped by Issue Area 25

B1. Executive Branch Departments and Agencies Participating in the Exit Survey 40

C1. Profiles of Survey Respondents 41

D1. Reasons Federal Employees Resigned: Ratings of Importance 43
D2. Reasons Federal Employees Retired: Ratings of Importance 44

E1. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents From Different Geographic Locations . . . 45
E2. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents at Different Grade Levels 46
E3. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents With Different Levels of Education 47
E4. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Male and Female Respondents 48
E5. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents With Different Levels of Job Satisfaction . 49

F1. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents With Different Performance Appraisal Ratings 50
F2. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents From Different Geographic Locations 51
F3. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents at Different Grade Levels 52
F4. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents With Different Levels of Education 53
F5. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Male and Female Respondents 54
F6. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents With Different Levels of Job Satisfaction . . . 55
F7. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents in Different Age Groups 56

FIGURES

A. Most Important Reasons for Resigning viii
B. Most Important Reasons for Retiring x

1. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: According to Performance Rating 15
2. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: According to Location of Work 15
3. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: According to Grade Level 16
4. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: According to Education Level 17
5. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: According to Gender 18
6. Most Important Reasons for Resigning: According to Level of Job Satisfaction 19
7. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: According to Performance Rating 26
8. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: According to Location of Work 27
9. Most Important Reasons for Retiring: According to Education Level 28

OVERVIEW

The success of virtually every endeavor of the Federal Government depends on the skills, abilities, and motivations of its work force. Yet, recent years have seen increasing concern about the quality of the Federal work force and the Government's ability to retain its most capable employees. In any given year, the Government loses nearly 120,000 full-time, permanent, white-collar employees. Why do these employees leave? What factors influence their decision? Do their reasons for leaving vary by where they work, their age, their occupation, or their level of pay? Knowing more about these reasons is an important first step in developing policies or programs that will help the Government retain its best employees and enhance the overall quality of the Federal work force. The purpose of this report is to provide some insight into why employees leave the Federal public service. The primary sources of information for this report were responses to a special exit survey developed by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) and completed by nearly 2,800 Federal employees who left full-time, permanent, white-collar positions during a 3-month period in 1989.

Faced with the dilemma posed by deficit reductions and the need for the Government to provide high-quality public service, the general public and Federal managers are increasingly raising questions about the quality of the Federal work force and its ability to exercise its mandate. There are concerns that the Government may no longer be competitive in attracting, hiring, and retaining its share of "the best and the brightest." Moreover, demographic projections indicate that the pool of qualified applicants will shrink during the 1990's and that highly qualified candidates will be difficult to find.

Until now, no Governmentwide studies have systematically determined what factors influence employees to leave the Federal Government. A 1989 MSPB report, titled "Who Is Leaving the Federal Government? An Analysis of Employee Turnover," described the magnitude of employee turnover. It described who left and at what rates of turnover, but it did not address why they left. Another MSPB report, released in October 1989, titled "The Senior Executive Service: Views of Former Federal Executives," provided useful information about the reasons senior executives left the Federal Government, but it did not address nonexecutives, the larger portion of the Federal work force. This report fills that gap.

As will be seen in this report, the reasons employees leave are diverse and vary considerably for different groups of employees. Some of the reasons for leaving are most appropriately addressed by policymakers at the national level. Others can be addressed immediately at the level of the agency or individual work unit. A third category consists of reasons that are more specific and apply to relatively small groups of employees. Reasons (e.g., needs for day care) in this third group might be most appropriately addressed by cooperative interagency initiatives.

Without concerted efforts on multiple levels, it will be difficult for the Federal Government to retain its most productive employees. Although it will not be without costs, the costs incurred are likely to be less than those incurred in replacing the high-performing employees who leave prematurely—not to mention the potential cost to this Nation in decreased public service.

Summary of General Findings

Some 2,778 employees leaving Government completed and returned the MSPB Exit Survey. About 54 percent of the surveys came from

employees who resigned, 37 percent came from employees who retired, and the remaining 9 percent came from respondents who left for other reasons.

Over half (54 percent) of the survey respondents reported that they were satisfied with the Government jobs they were leaving, and 58 percent would recommend working for the Government to their friends.

Although about 61 percent of the survey participants had "outstanding" or "exceeds fully successful" performance ratings, over three-quarters (78 percent) of the survey participants indicated that management had not tried to keep them from leaving.

Almost three-fourths (73 percent) of the employees who left, believed they were paid less than non-Government employees doing comparable work.

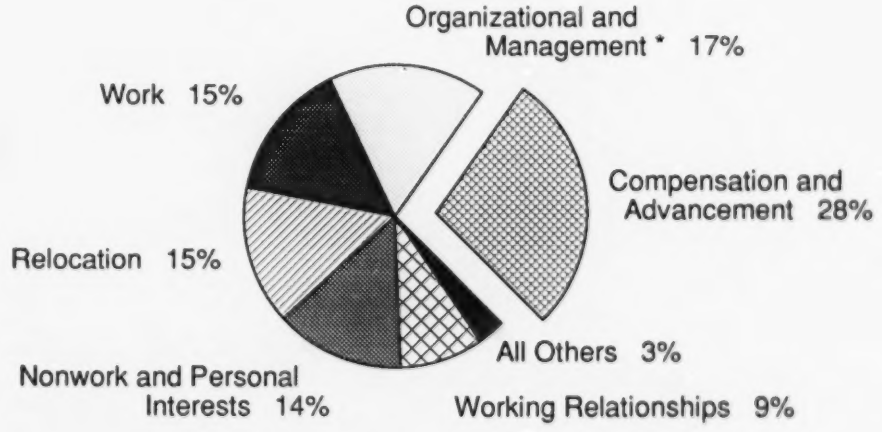
The typical employee who left the Government gave multiple reasons for doing so. Because employees who retire are so different from employees who resign, these two groups are generally discussed separately in this report. The following section discusses some of the reasons employees resign.

Why Employees Resigned

The typical employee who resigned and completed the survey was 35 years old, had 6 years of Government experience, and was working at an average grade level of 7.6. About two-thirds of all resignees were women and over half of the resignees had a Bachelor's degree or higher. Forty-two percent of the respondents who resigned had been promoted within the last year, 44 percent had been satisfied with their Government job, and 56 percent would recommend working for the Government to their friends.

Survey respondents were asked to identify the single most important reason for leaving from a list of 46 possible reasons. For ease of presentation, these reasons were grouped into nine issue areas. (Table 2 of this report, shows the nine issue areas and the reasons that define each area.)

Figure A. Most Important Reasons for Resigning
(Shown by Issue Area)



Note: Respondents chose the single most important reason for resigning.
* Composite of 13 reasons for resigning.

As is shown in figure A, the reasons selected most frequently as the single most important reason for resigning fit into six of the nine issue areas, namely:

Issue Area	Percentage of Respondents
Compensation and advancement	28
Organizational and management	17
Work-related issues	15
Relocation issues	15
Nonwork and personal interests issues	14
Working relationships	9

- Less frequently selected reasons for resigning concerned office support, employee benefits, and reorganizations (3 percent, cumulatively).
- In addition to the general reasons for resigning, some employees resigned for highly specific reasons. These reasons included: spouse was transferred, or the desire to move to a different town, work closer to home, continue one's education, obtain better day care, and/or pursue nonwork (usually, family) interests.
- The importance of compensation and advancement reasons was confirmed by the 71 percent of respondents who resigned to work full-time elsewhere. These respondents reported that their job change would result in an average 26-percent increase in their salary, from $27,000 to $34,000.

The most important reasons for resigning varied for different groups of respondents. These differences suggest that strategies to reduce unwanted turnover are likely to be most effective if tailored to the reasons most important for each group. Some of the major group differences follow:

- Respondents with "outstanding" performance ratings were more likely to select compensation and advancement issues as the most important reason for resigning than employees with "fully successful" ratings (34 percent vs. 25 percent). Outstanding respondents were also more likely to cite relocation reasons (19 percent vs. 14 percent).
- In the selected high-cost areas of New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, employees resigned for compensation and advancement reasons 37 percent of the time. This compared to 29 percent for Washington, DC, also a high-cost area, and 25 percent for all other areas.
- Compensation and advancement was about equally important across grade levels. However, this finding masked two opposing trends within this issue area. As grade level *increased*, so did the importance of improving one's career opportunities as a reason for leaving, from 5 percent to 13 percent. Simultaneously, the importance of the desire for more money *decreased*, from 13 percent at the lower grade levels to 7 percent at the higher levels.
- Compared to the men who resigned, women were less likely to resign for compensation and advancement reasons (23 percent of women vs. 36 percent of men). The women, however, resigned more frequently because a spouse was transferred (7 percent vs. 1 percent) or to pursue nonwork interests (17 percent vs. 7 percent).

Why Employees Retired

The typical retiree responding to the survey was 59 years old, had 26 years of Government experience, and worked at a grade level of 10.9. Forty-three percent of the retirees had college degrees and about one-third were women.

Many retirees left shortly after first becoming eligible to retire and at a relatively early age. About 31 percent retired before the age of 57 and 40 percent retired within the first year of their eligibility.

Most (67 percent) of the retirees were satisfied with their Government jobs and 58 percent would recommend working for the Federal Government to their friends. For 37 percent of the retirees, their last promotion had been 10 or more years ago, although 59 percent had received at least one monetary award in the past 2 years.

Fewer than one-fifth (17 percent) of the retirees planned to work full-time after leaving the Government. Those who did plan to work full-time reported they would gain an average salary increase of about 8 percent over their Government salaries.

Out of the 46 possible reasons for leaving, the retirees predominantly selected two reasons as the single most important reason for retiring:

Reason	Percentage of Respondents
Concern about changes in the retirement system	20
Desire to pursue nonwork interests	18

The next most frequently selected reason—too much job stress—was chosen by 6 percent of the retirees.

Figure B shows how frequently the selected reasons for retiring fit into each of the nine issue areas. The frequent selections of "concern about changes in the retirement system" and the "desire to pursue nonwork interests" accounted for virtually all the selections in the benefits issue area (21 percent) and the nonwork and personal interests issue area (23 percent), respectively.

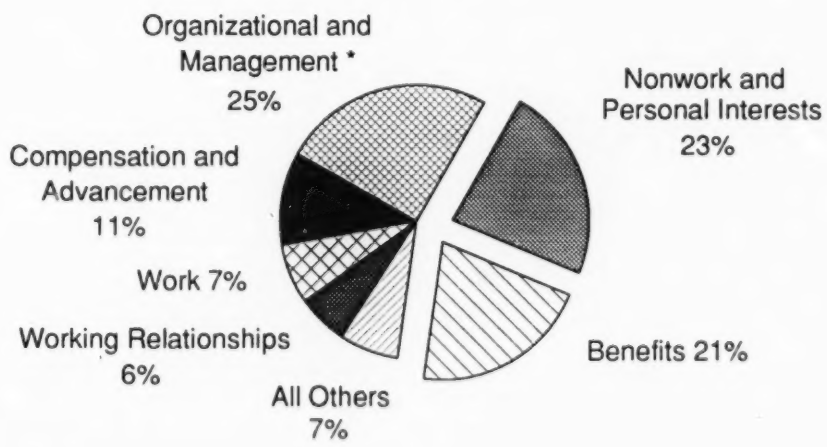
Figure B shows that reasons related to organizational and management issues accounted for 25 percent of the most important reasons for leaving. This is due, in part, because this category grouped 13 different reasons for leaving—more than twice the number for any other grouping. Most individual reasons in this group were selected relatively infrequently as the most important reason for leaving. The previously mentioned factor of too much job stress (6 percent) and unfair promotion practices (4 percent) were the most frequently reported reasons in this group.

Less important factors in the decision to retire were compensation and advancement issues (11 percent), the work itself (7 percent), working relationships (6 percent), and issues related to office support, relocations, and reorganizations (7 percent, cumulatively).

Although the variations in reasons for leaving were not as large as they were for different groups of resignees, different groups of retirees did differ in some ways, as shown below:

- "Outstanding" retirees cited compensation and advancement issues much more frequently (15 percent vs. 7 percent) than "fully successful"

Figure B. Most Important Reasons for Retiring
(Shown by Issue Area)



Note: Respondents chose the single most important reason for retiring.

* Composite of 13 reasons for retiring

retirees as most important in their decision to retire.

- Retirees outside the selected high-cost areas reported much concern about changes to the retirement system (22 percent). Their concern about the changes was considerably greater than it was for retirees in Washington, DC (12 percent), or for retirees in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, taken together (16 percent). Conversely, retirees outside the high-cost areas less frequently reported compensation and advancement as most important reasons for leaving (9 percent vs. 16 percent for Washington, DC, and 18 percent for the other selected high-cost areas.)
- Compensation and advancement issues were more important for retirees with college degrees (15 percent) than for retirees without college degrees (7 percent).
- Retirees in the higher grade levels (GS-11 through GS-15) were much more concerned about benefits issues (specifically, changes in the retirement system) than lower graded retirees (GS-5 or lower). Among higher graded retirees, 24 percent cited benefits issues as most important compared to only 12 percent of the lower graded retirees.
- Compensation and advancement issues and benefits issues were mentioned less frequently by the women who retired than by the men. However, organizational and management issues (specifically, job stress), nonwork and personal interests, and poor working relationships were mentioned more frequently by the women.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Because employees leave the Federal Government for a variety of reasons, multiple strategies, tailored to individual groups, agencies, and locations, will be required in any attempts to reduce unwanted turnover. The survey results indicate that many of the respondents who left were successful and experienced employees. Although there was probably nothing the Government could have done to keep many of these employees from leaving, many other employees might have remained productive members of the work force if the Government had taken actions responsive to certain key issues.

Strategies to reduce unwanted turnover among resignees will differ from those designed to reduce the early retirement of experienced employees. However, the strategies for both groups need to be addressed on multiple levels.

- On the national level, the survey results help validate current initiatives by Congress and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) which address issues related to the compensation and advancement of Federal employees. The high frequency with which compensation and advancement issues were selected as the most important reason for resigning, particularly by more outstanding employees and by employees working in high-cost areas, lends increased urgency to these initiatives.
- At the agency and work unit levels, Federal managers can immediately address issues that are often secondary in importance, but which are, nevertheless, important contributing factors in decisions to resign. These factors include: desire for more meaningful work, poor cooperation between upper level management and employees, low morale of the work group, too little recognition, inconsistent policies and procedures, and unfair promotion practices.
- In addition to addressing compensation and advancement issues and the secondary reasons for resigning, individual Federal managers also can address some of the highly specific reasons respondents gave for resigning. Although these reasons (e.g, the desire to continue one's education or the desire to move to a different town) apply to relatively few employees, their specificity makes them particularly likely to be responsive to focussed remedies, and cumulatively, these relatively small groups of resignees represent a substantial portion of all the employees who resigned.

The Government is also losing employees because of unnecessarily early retirements. Forty percent of the respondents who retired left within the first year of their eligibility. Unnecessary and premature losses of experienced employees, particularly at a time of

concern over the quality of the Federal work force, are not in the Nation's best interest.

The most frequently cited reason employees retired—concern about changes in the retirement system—may have been particularly heightened during the survey period. During that time, Congress was debating ways to limit the size of the lump sum payment that annuitants could opt to receive upon retirement. Nonetheless, it is evident that retirement concerns are critically important and not to be ignored. As with strategies to reduce resignations, strategies to reduce unwanted retirements will also need to be addressed on multiple levels. For example:

- At the national level, legislation changing the retirement system should be kept to a minimum, and when necessary, should ensure that retirement-eligible employees who wish to continue working are not unduly penalized. For example, employees who are retirement-eligible at the time of the new legislation could be made exempt from the new provisions for a specified period of time. Such an exemption would allow retirement-eligible employees to work at least through the duration of the "grace period" without a reduction in benefits and may reduce the number of premature retirements. Also, OPM could promote policies encouraging agencies to enhance their career counseling and retirement planning capabilities to provide retirement-eligible employees with more attractive inducements for continued service.
- At the agency and work unit levels, many respondents retired for reasons having to do with organizational and management issues that could be addressed at those levels. Almost half (46 percent) of the retirees indicated that "too much job stress" was important in their decision to retire. Retirees also cited perceptions of too much red tape, unfair promotion practices, inconsistent policies, poor cooperation between upper level management and employees, low morale, and too little recognition for their work contributions.
- Federal employers should also consider designing new methods of recruiting, training, and retaining older workers. Agencies may wish to explore with their valued retirement-eligible employees options for continued service. For example, more extensive use of part-time or reemployed annuitant provisions, contract work which does not violate post-employment regulations, leaves of absence, flexible work hours, job sharing, or reassignments to less stressful or demanding positions might be considered attractive options for some retirement-eligible workers. Other retirement-eligible workers may be more receptive to greater involvement in the work, monetary incentives, better use of their skills, or more recognition for their accomplishments.

In summary, there are many reasons employees leave the Government—only some of which are within the ability of the Government to influence. Nonetheless, where employee turnover is adversely affecting the ability of the Government to fulfill its role in meeting the needs of the Nation, then it is in the national interest to take action to better manage turnover—both now and in the future, when the needs in some areas are projected to become particularly critical.

As there are many reasons employees leave, there must be different strategies to reduce unwanted turnover. To implement some of those strategies will require congressional action, others require the cooperation of central management agencies within the executive branch, and still others are within the control of individual agencies or managers. This report—together with MSPB's August 1989 report on *who* is leaving the Government—provides some useful insights into the magnitude and nature of the turnover problem and suggests some possible solutions.

12

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Government is faced with a "crisis of competence." With increasing constraints in the Federal budget, there are increasing concerns about the quality of the Federal work force[1] and the Government's ability to compete for its fair share of the qualified labor pool.[2] The issues are exacerbated by projections that the pool of qualified applicants will shrink in the 1990's and that competition will intensify for the available pool of workers, particularly in high-skill occupations.[3] The issues are complex and need to be addressed on multiple levels. The Federal Government needs to examine how it attracts and recruits new employees, how it trains and motivates its work force to accomplish its diverse missions, how well it retains its most able employees, and even how it determines whether the quality of its work force is changing.

A number of initiatives are already under way. For example, in May 1989, MSPB and OPM sponsored a conference on work force quality assessment,[4] and the two agencies are currently collaborating on a joint effort to promote, monitor, and conduct research on Federal work force quality. To aid this effort, an advisory committee consisting of representatives from the public sectors, academia, professional associations, unions, and other private sector groups has been established.

The primary objective of this report is to provide Federal policymakers and managers with information about the reasons employees leave the Federal public service. Until now, there has been little or no Governmentwide information about the reasons employees leave. Knowing more about why employees leave is an important first step in developing strategies to reduce unwanted turnover of high-performing employees and to maintain or enhance the quality of the Federal work force.

This report builds on two earlier reports by MSPB. The first, on employee turnover, shows that Federal employees leave the Government at an average rate of about 9 percent per year. Although this rate is relatively low compared to rates for some other major employers, it still represents a tremendous loss of resources—about 120,000 full-time, permanent, white-collar employees each year, 15,000 with "outstanding" performance appraisal ratings.[5] Furthermore, the turnover within some occupational specialties (e.g., nurses) and in some locations is much higher than the average.[6]

---

[1] National Commission on the Public Service, "Leadership for America: Rebuilding the Public Service," Washington, DC, May 1989; National Academy of Public Administration, "The Quiet Crisis of the Civil Service: The Federal Personnel System at the Crossroads," Washington, DC, December 1986.

[2] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "Attracting Quality Graduates to the Federal Government: A View of College Recruiting," July 1988; U.S. General Accounting Office, "Managing Human Resources: Greater OPM Leadership Needed to Address Critical Challenges," January 1989, p. 16.

[3] U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "Civil Service 2000," June 1988, p. 27.

[4] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board and U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "A Report on the Conference on Workforce Quality Assessment," September 1989.

[5] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "Who Is Leaving the Federal Government? An Analysis of Employee Turnover," August 1989, pp. 9, 15.

[6] U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "Federal White-Collar Pay System: Research Report III, Federal Employee Turnover Study," August 1989, pp. 29-30.

Although not all of this turnover is unavoidable or undesirable, it is all costly.[7]

The second MSPB report, which dealt in part with employee turnover, found that inadequate compensation was the most frequently cited reason senior executives left the Federal service. This report noted that job dissatisfaction also played an important role.[8]

Neither of these two MSPB reports addressed the question of why nonexecutives leave the Government. Nonexecutive employees comprise the large majority of the Federal work force and are an important component in current debates about the quality of this work force.[9] Without accurate information about why these employees leave, it is difficult for Federal policymakers and managers to know how to best allocate the Government's scarce resources to retain its most outstanding employees and maintain a high-quality Federal work force.

There is currently no Governmentwide system for obtaining detailed exit information from employees leaving the Federal civil service.[10] Although some Federal agencies and organizations routinely use exit surveys or interviews, the resultant data are seldom consolidated in a systematic fashion or made available outside the immediate organization. With demographic predictions indicating that women and older workers will comprise increasingly larger portions of the Federal work force,[11] Federal employers in highly competitive labor markets will want this type of information to develop strategies that specifically address the needs of these and other employee groups.

To address the need for more useful Governmentwide information about the reasons employees leave, MSPB developed and conducted an exit survey of full-time, permanent, white-collar employees leaving the Government. The MSPB Exit Survey was designed to provide information useful at a variety of levels and for a variety of purposes. (A facsimile of the Exit Survey is contained in app. A.) The primary purpose was to provide a systematic and detailed look at the reasons nonexecutive employees are leaving the Government. In addition, the study would provide useful information about the utility and feasibility of obtaining Governmentwide exit information.

The Exit Survey results help answer a variety of questions. For example, what are the most important reasons employees leave? How important are monetary issues in the decision to leave? Are monetary issues more important in high-cost areas than low-cost areas? How do the reasons for leaving differ for employees who resign versus employees who retire? How satisfied were separating Federal employees with the jobs and work situations they were leaving? Do the reasons for leaving differ by employees' level of education, type of occupation, age, length of service, grade level, level of job satisfaction, or performance appraisal rating?

The answers that survey participants could choose in responding to these questions were designed, in part, to provide a baseline for the development of Governmentwide trends. They were also intended to help Federal policymakers by providing common definitions and a frame of reference for discussions about the reasons for employee turnover and for the possible design of strategies to reduce unnecessary and unwanted turnover.

We had no particular expectations about the reasons Federal employees leave the Government. Some observers have suggested that the gap between Federal and private sector pay has become a major

[7] Wilkinson, Roderick, "Exploding the myth about employees who leave," Supervision, February 1988, pp. 3-5; Watts, Larry R., and White, Harold C., "Assessing employee turnover," Personnel Administrator, April 1988, pp. 80-85; Hall, Thomas, E., "How to estimate employee turnover costs," Personnel, 1981, vol. 58, pp. 43-52; Blakeslee, G. Spencer, Suntrup, Edward L., and Keraghan, John A., "How much is turnover costing you?" Personnel Journal, November 1985, pp. 99-103; Congressional Budget Office, "Employee Turnover in the Federal Government," February 1986, pp. 27-30.

[8] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "The Senior Executive Service: Views of Former Federal Executives," October 1989, pp. 9-11.

[9] U.S. General Accounting Office, "Managing Human Resources: Greater OPM Leadership Needed to Address Critical Challenges," January 1989, p. 16; National Treasury Union, "Transition to the Future of the Federal Service: The Employee Perspective," Washington, DC, pp. 5-8.

[10] U.S. General Accounting Office, "Federal Work Force: A Framework for Studying Its Quality Over Time," August 1988, pp. 58-65.

[11] U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "Civil Service 2000," June 1988, p. 27.

disincentive to retaining a high-performing work force.[12] Until now there has been little or no hard evidence to support or refute this assertion. Others have suggested that the importance of pay may be exaggerated because the mention of pay—as a reason for leaving—is convenient, is seldom challenged, and generally is a "harmless way" to exit an organization without "burning one's bridges."[13] It is increasingly being recognized that, in addition to wanting adequate compensation, workers want their work to be meaningful and challenging[14] and that many workers have important interests and concerns outside of work.[15] If this is so, nonmonetary reasons should also play significant roles in decisions to leave the Federal public service.

The information provided in this report is a summary of the most significant findings of the Exit Survey. More detailed discussions of the procedures and baseline data are included in the appendixes, so that trends and potential problems can be readily identified.

---

[12] National Commission on the Public Service, "Leadership for America: Rebuilding the Public Service," Washington, DC, May 1989, p. 38; Wyatt Company, "Study of Federal Employee Locality Pay: Executive Summary," Philadelphia, PA, July 1989, p. 7; National Commission on the Public Service, Task Force on Recruiting and Retention, "Committing to Excellence: Recruiting and Retaining a Quality Public Service," Washington, DC, April 1989, pp. 89-91.

[13] Giacalone, Robert A., and Knouse, Stephen B., "Farewell to fruitless interviews," Personnel, September 1989, pp. 60-62; Roseman, Edward, "Managing Employee Turnover," American Management Association, New York, 1981, pp. 57-64.

[14] Yankelovich, Daniel, and Immerwahr, John, "Putting the Work Ethic to Work: A Public Agenda Report on Restoring America's Competitive Vitality," Public Agenda Foundation, New York, 1983, pp. 1-6.

[15] U.S. Department of Labor, "Opportunity 2000," September 1988, pp. 19-63; National Academy of Public Administration, "The future of the public service," statement of Ray Kline before the Subcommittee on Civil Service, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Mar. 24, 1988.

APPROACH

Sources of Information

The primary sources of information for this report were the responses of 2,778 full-time, permanent, white-collar employees who left the Federal Government during April, May, and June of 1989 and who completed a special exit survey developed by MSPB. Members of the Senior Executive Service, blue-collar employees, nonpermanent employees, part-time employees, and employees moving (i.e., transferring) from one Federal agency to another were not included in the survey.

Some 1,510 (54 percent) of the returned surveys came from employees who had resigned and 1,001 (37 percent) came from employees who had retired. Because of their diversity and relatively small number, responses from employees who left the Government for other reasons were not included in our analyses.

To ensure maximum confidentiality, the MSPB Exit Survey (see appendix A) asked for no uniquely identifying information and all completed surveys were returned directly by the respondents to the MSPB survey contractor in a postpaid envelope provided with the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and because respondents were anonymous, there was no followup of any kind.

"I wish to put my name on this [questionnaire]. I do not wish to be anonymous."

A 58-year-old GS-12 mine safety inspector who resigned after 15 years of service

Distribution Procedures

The Exit Surveys were distributed Governmentwide through a sample of 198 personnel offices. It was up to each participating personnel office to determine how best to distribute the Exit Surveys. Many personnel offices were able to directly hand the survey packets to separating employees during the agency's normal exit clearance process. Some offices had to make secondary distributions through remote satellite locations, while others found it more effective to mail the survey packets to the separating employees.

Data from the Central Personnel Data File of OPM showed that 11,741 full-time, permanent, white-collar employees left the Government from the 198 participating personnel offices during the survey period. Based on the information provided by the participating personnel offices, surveys were distributed to an estimated 6,440 separating employees.

Although the difficulties encountered in distributing the survey to all employees who left decreased the size of the survey sample, the reasons for the shortfall appeared to be procedural (e.g, surveys were not delivered, instructions were misunderstood, and the survey supply was exhausted before the end of the survey period) and were not expected to affect the representativeness of the sample.

Response Rate

Of the 6,440 surveys distributed, 2,778 surveys were completed and returned for an overall response rate of 43 percent. Although this response rate is relatively high for an anonymous survey of this type, it is important to know how this constrains the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn

from the survey results. To determine these constraints, we compared the employees who completed the survey with all the employees who left the Government during the survey period. As is shown in table 1, the employees who completed the survey tended to be more highly educated, more experienced, and in higher-level occupations than separated employees in general. This is consistent with the literature about the respondents for these types of surveys.[16]

The comparisons in table 1 show that the Exit Survey results are most representative of employees at higher grade levels, with more education, and

Table 1.
Comparisons of the Survey Respondents With All Separations During the Third Quarter of 1989 and During All of 1987

Characteristics	Survey Respondents (Percent)	Third Quarter FY 1989: Participating Personnel Offices (Percent)	Third Quarter FY 1989: All Offices Personnel (Percent)	CY 1987 (Percent)
TYPE OF SEPARATION				
Resignations	54	59	58	58
Retirements	37	25	27	25
Other	9	16	15	17
GENDER				
Male	49	45	46	46
Female	51	55	54	54
EDUCATION LEVEL				
No Bachelor's Degree	53	72	70	70
Bachelor's Degree or higher	47	27	29	30
GRADE LEVEL				
GS 1-5	26	49	43	42
GS 6-10	30	24	28	30
GS 11-15	43	26	29	27
TYPE OF OCCUPATION[1]				
Professional	26	15	17	18
Administrative	27	19	21	21
Technical/Clerical/Others	47	66	61	61
Total Number	2,778	11,741	30,384	119,669

Note: Due to rounding, percentages do not always total 100. All data for the third quarter of FY 1989 and for CY 1987 were derived from the Central Personnel Data Files maintained by OPM.

[1]Based on OPM's PATCO classification system. This system groups Federal white-collar occupations into five categories (Professional, Administrative, Technical, Clerical, and Other) on the basis of their subject matter, their level of difficulty or responsibility, and their educational requirements. For details, see the "Federal Personnel Manual, Supplement 292-1, Book IV," May 1985, pp. 15-16.

[16] Fowler Jr., Floyd J., "Survey Research Methods," Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA, 1984, p. 49.

with more experience. These types of employees are among those in which the Government currently has a particular interest.

Sampling Procedures

In addition to the response rate, two other sampling procedures must be evaluated. First, it is important to know how representative the 198 personnel offices were of the more than 1,500 personnel offices Governmentwide. Second, we would like to know if the 3-month survey period was typical of the types of separations that might be expected over a full year.

Table 1 shows that the characteristics of the employees who left the Government from the participating personnel offices did not differ meaningfully from those of all the employees who left from all personnel offices. This confirms the view that the 198 participating personnel offices are a representative sample of all Federal personnel offices. This was not unexpected, since the participating personnel offices had been selected because they serviced approximately one-third of the civilian Federal work force and represented the organizational diversity of the 22 largest Federal departments and agencies, as shown in appendix B.

Table 1 also shows that the types of separations during the 3-month survey period were typical of those encountered during a full year. In fact, after rounding, the distributions of the demographic characteristics for the employees leaving during these two different time periods were virtually identical.

Interpretation of the Survey Findings

The results of the Exit Survey should be considered the beginning of an investigation into the factors that underlie employee decisions to leave the Federal Government. The Exit Survey helps pinpoint the most critical problem areas and their relative importance. Because the data in this report are presented in summary form, the findings may not always be applicable to all localities, to all occupations, to each work group, or to every agency. More detailed followup within each Federal agency should be helpful in pinpointing and more fully understanding the dynamics of employee turnover in particular situations or for particular groups of employees.

The results of the survey should also not be extended to the types of employees who did not complete the Exit Survey. Studies of separated employees with less education, less experience, and lower grade levels would reveal more clearly if the reasons for which these types of employees leave differ meaningfully from those of the employees who completed the Exit Survey.

Because employees decide to leave the Federal Government for many reasons, care should be taken in assuming direct cause-and-effect relationships between any single reason for leaving and the decision to leave. In addition, any differences among groups of employees do not necessarily imply that group membership *caused* the differences. Often group differences are attributable to other related factors. For example, a recent study of Federal white-collar turnover concluded that the "male-female differences [in quit rates] seem to be almost entirely due to differences in average wage, salary, and length of service. Men and women in similar circumstances have very similar turnover probabilities."[17]

Finally, for the purposes of this report, the percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent. Because of this rounding, percentages in the figures, tables, and the text do not always add to their totals.

[17] Lewis, Gregory B., and Park, Kyungho, "Turnover rates in Federal white-collar employment: Are women more likely to quit than men?" American Review of Public Administration, vol. 19, No. 1, March 1989, pp. 13-28.

GENERAL FINDINGS

How Many Reasons Were Important in the Decisions to Leave?

It is generally agreed that many reasons influence a person's decision to leave the Government.[18] However, there has been little or no information about how many reasons might be involved in the decision.

Our survey results revealed a considerably greater number of important reasons for leaving than we expected. When employees could rate as many reasons as they wished from a list of 46 reasons, those who resigned indicated that an average of 16 reasons were "somewhat" or "extremely important" in their decision to resign. Employees who retired reported fewer important reasons, but even they reported an average of 11 reasons as being at least "somewhat important" in their decision to retire.

Did We Overlook Any Important Reasons for Leaving?

Question 2 of the Exit Survey gave respondents the opportunity to write in up to two additional reasons for leaving—over and above the 46 listed reasons. This was done to ensure that no important reasons for leaving were overlooked. Some 24 percent of those who resigned and 22 percent of those who retired wrote in at least one additional reason for leaving.

An analysis of the write-ins indicated that the Exit Survey's list of reasons for leaving was complete in that no important reasons had been overlooked. Virtually all the write-ins duplicated or were specific examples of one or more of the 46 reasons we had provided.

"The Federal Government has treated me quite well so I should not complain. My real frustration came from the fact that this agency could do a much better job with its resources. Personnel regulations are one of the barriers to successful Government operations."

A 62-year-old GS-11 facilities manager who retired in his second year of eligibility

[18] Mobley, William H., "Employee turnover: Causes, consequences, and control," Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1982, pp. 77-114.

RESIGNATIONS

Who Resigned?

The average employee who resigned and completed the Exit Survey was 35 years old with 6 years of Government experience and had an average grade of 7.6. About two-thirds of the resignees were women, and almost 10 percent were supervisors.

Nearly 20 percent of the resignees left after more than 10 years of Government service. This is surprising considering the sizable economic disincentives these resignees incur upon leaving. The calculations in one study showed that a 35-year-old resignee with 10 years of Federal service sacrifices a capital loss in pension benefits that is almost three times the resignee's current salary—a loss more than twice that incurred by a resignee in the private sector. Moreover, to offset this loss, the Federal worker requires an 18 percent salary increase compared to an 8-percent increase for the private sector worker.[19]

Although other comparisons may not be quite so vivid, it is generally acknowledged that there are strong reasons for Federal workers to remain employed with the Government, particularly if they have more than 10 years of service. Nevertheless, it would appear that the alleged "golden handcuffs" of the civil service retirement system do not hold everyone. Preliminary analysis suggests that women may bear a disproportionately large share of the capital losses (in pension benefits) that are incurred by resignations from the Federal civil service.

As a group, the resignees were highly educated and capable employees. Fifty-one percent had at least a Bachelor's degree, and 60 percent of the resignees reported performance appraisal ratings of "outstanding" or "exceeds fully successful." Surprisingly, only 25 percent of the resignees reported that their management had tried to keep them from leaving.

Although 42 percent of the resignees had been promoted within the last year and 48 percent had received one or more monetary awards in the last 2 years, these incentives were apparently not sufficient to retain these resignees.

Most resignees left for higher-paying jobs. The 1,045 resignees (71 percent) who planned to work full-time after leaving reported that their average annual salary would increase from $27,000 in their Government job to $34,000 in their non-Government job—an increase of 26 percent. Relatively few (7 percent) resignees—usually medical doctors and attorneys—reported a salary increase of more than $20,000. On the other hand, a surprisingly large proportion (24 percent) of the resignees took jobs paying the *same* or *less* than their Government jobs.

Fifteen percent of the resignees indicated they would still be working on Government projects in their new jobs. Most (81 percent) of the resignees believed that their Government experience had made them more marketable and 23 percent believed it would be very difficult for their supervisor to replace them.

Some 43 percent of the resignees indicated they would be willing to work for the Government in the future. Only 15 percent said they would not, while the remainder (42 percent) were not sure. Fifty-six percent would recommend Government work to their friends. This is slightly more than the 49 percent of current Federal workers who would make such a recommendation.[20] Possibly, the

[19] Ippolito, R. A., "Why federal workers don't quit," The Journal of Human Resources, vol. 22, No. 2, 1987, pp. 286-287.

[20] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "Working for America: A Federal Employee Survey," report to be published in June 1990.

attitudes toward the Government become more positive once an employee has decided to leave.

Although resignees might have been actively *searching* for new jobs, they were not particularly active in *applying* for new jobs. Only 17 percent of the resignees had applied for more than five jobs in the last year. Twenty-one percent had applied for only one job and 34 percent had not made any job application. This paucity of job applications suggests that more than a few resignations may have been the result of unsolicited outside job offers rather than an active job application process.

In summary, the profile of the resignees who completed the Exit Survey shows that they were generally well educated, experienced, and highly rated employees. Appendix C includes a more detailed summary of the characteristics of the resignees in the survey sample.

Why Did Federal Employees Resign?

The Exit Survey question (3a) that most directly addresses why employees left the Federal Government asked, "From the list of Reasons for Leaving, shown in question 2, select the ONE reason that was **most** important in your decision to leave." Some 1,415 resignees selected their single most important reason from the 46 possible reasons (plus up to two write-ins) listed in question 2.

To facilitate presenting the results, we grouped the 46 reasons for leaving into nine issue areas, based on both statistical and logical considerations. Each issue area was defined by 3 to 13 reasons for leaving. The nine issue areas are shown in table 2, along with the reasons included in each and the percentages of respondents who selected each reason as most important for resigning.

Table 2 shows that almost every reason listed was selected as "most important" by at least some of the employees who resigned. The most important reasons for leaving fit in six of the nine issue areas. From the most to the least frequently selected, these six areas were:

Issue Area	Percentage of Respondents
Compensation and advancement issues	28
Organizational and management issues	17
Work-related issues	15
Relocation issues	15
Nonwork and personal interests issues	14
Working relationships issues	9

Reasons for leaving related to inadequate office support (2 percent), employee benefits (1 percent), and reorganizations (less than one-half of 1 percent), were seldom mentioned as most important.

By far, the reasons for resigning (reported most frequently as "most important") were related to compensation and advancement issues. Similarly, when respondents answered question 2, each of the four reasons in the compensation and advancement issue area was rated "important" by 60 percent or more of the employees who resigned. A complete summary of the responses to question 2 of the Exit Survey is included in appendix D.

"Candidates should start at a rate of pay which reflects their experience and qualifications, not at the lowest grade for their job title. I was started out at a GS-5 level with graduate work, a high GPA, and 3 years similar experience. This saved [the Government] money in the short term, but contributed to my leaving after 4 years."

A 32-year-old GS-7 biological technician with an "outstanding" performance rating who resigned

The relative importance of the various reasons for resigning is consistent with the views of current Federal employees about their reasons for staying in or leaving the Government. In a recent MSPB survey of Federal employees, "promotion opportunities" was the single most frequently cited as a reason for wanting to leave the Government. This was followed closely by salary and private sector job opportunities.[21]

Four secondary issue areas were also important in the decision to resign, although they were cited less

[21] Ibid.

Table 2. Most Important Reasons for Resigning Grouped by Issue Area

COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT ISSUES—28%
- (10) Desire to earn more money
- (8) Desire to improve career opportunities
- (7) Insufficient pay
- (3) Few opportunities for advancement

ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT ISSUES—17%
- (3) Too much job stress
- (2) Poor cooperation between upper level management and employees
- (2) Unfair promotion practices
- (2) Desire to work for another employer
- (1) Inconsistent policies or procedures
- (1) Low morale of my work group
- (1) Organization was becoming too political
- (1) Too little recognition for my work accomplishments
- (1) Too much red tape
- (1) Poor working relationship with higher level supervisor(s)
- (1) Poor public image of Federal workers
- (1) My job duties were not consistent with my grade
- (-) Lack of opportunity to participate in decision making

WORK-RELATED ISSUES—15%
- (6) My job did not make good use of my skills and abilities
- (4) Desire to change to a different type of work
- (3) Desire for more meaningful work
- (1) The work was not meaningful to me
- (1) Not enough training to do the job well
- (1) My job was changed and made less attractive

RELOCATION ISSUES—15%
- (7) Desire to move to a different city or town
- (5) Spouse was transferred
- (3) Desire to work closer to home

NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS ISSUES—14%
- (5) Desire to pursue nonwork interests
- (4) Desire to continue my education
- (2) Difficulties in getting adequate day care
- (2) Personal health problems
- (2) Unsatisfactory working hours or shifts

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS ISSUES—9%
- (4) Poor working relationship with my immediate supervisor
- (3) Discrimination
- (1) Management wanted to fire or demote me
- (-) Coworkers did not do their fair share of the work
- (-) Poor working relationship with my coworkers

SUPPORT ISSUES—2%
- (1) Unsatisfactory working conditions; e.g., space, heat, furniture
- (1) Work group did not have enough trained people to do all the work
- (-) Inadequate support; e.g., equipment, supplies, office assistance

BENEFITS ISSUES—1%
- (-) Concern about changes in the retirement system
- (-) Unsatisfactory retirement benefits
- (1) Unsatisfactory health benefits
- (-) Unsatisfactory leave benefits

REORGANIZATION ISSUES—-%
- (-) My job was being abolished
- (-) My job was being relocated
- (-) Concern about reorganization

Note: This table shows the reasons making up each issue area and, in parentheses, the percentages of employees who selected each reason as the single, most important reason for resigning. Because all percentages are rounded, they do not always total 100 percent or the issue area total. A dash (-) indicates the percentage was less than one-half of 1 percent.

frequently than compensation and advancement. The first of these, the organizational and management issue area, was rated second in overall importance. However, this was due, in large part, to the relatively large number (13) of reasons in this issue area. No single organizational or management reason—by itself—was particularly important in the decision to leave. Together, however, the 13 reasons in this issue area accounted for one-sixth of the most important reasons for resigning.

Unlike the compensation and advancement issues which are best addressed at the national level, the organizational and management issues are often directly within the control of Federal managers and supervisors and are best addressed and remedied, if necessary, at agency and work unit levels.

"I was paid a large amount of money (GS-13) to perform the duties that probably required the skills of a clerical person."

A "dissatisfied" 40-year old who resigned and took a $13,000 pay cut to teach in college

Another secondary issue area concerned the work itself. Although work-related reasons were not frequently selected as the single most important reason for leaving, examination of ratings of importance on question 2 of the Exit Survey (see appendix D) reveals that 60 percent of the employees who resigned rated "desire for more meaningful work" at least somewhat important in their decision to resign. Some 55 percent of the employees who resigned reported that their job "did not make good use of [their] skills and abilities."

"I joined this organization 15 years ago to do something of value. This has become meaningless work. It is extremely important to me that what I do and who I am is of value and has meaning."

A GS-12 resignee with 15 years' experience

The relative importance of these work-related issues challenges Federal employers to examine how well workers' skills, abilities, and expectations match the requirements of the jobs they are required to perform. Have too many workers been placed in jobs for which they are overqualified? If so, can their job duties and responsibilities be made more challenging? If not, are there ways of retraining these employees so that their skills can be used elsewhere? Why did 60 percent of the resignees express a desire for more meaningful work? Had their work become so routinized and fragmented that all semblances of public service were lost? Or, was it something in the way management treated their work?

"I was forced to resign because I could not afford to pay the cost of moving to a field office. I was told the move was mandatory. If approximately $800-$900 could have been made available, I would have been able to move."

A 24-year-old GS-7 physical scientist resignee with 2 years' experience

Two other issue areas warrant discussion: relocation, and nonwork and personal interests. What made these two areas unique was not so much their overall importance, which was relatively low, but the disproportionate importance some reasons in these areas had for some employees. These reasons and the percentage of the resignees who rated each important were: spouse was transferred (8 percent), desire to move to a different city or town (26 percent), desire to pursue nonwork interests (28 percent), problems getting day care (9 percent), desire to work closer to home (26 percent), desire to continue one's education (31 percent), and desire to change to a different type of work (45 percent). The specificity of the preceding reasons makes them particularly amenable to focussed remedies, and their disproportionate importance to employees warrants a concerted effort to address them.

"My main reason for leaving was to stay home and raise my two small children. However, if the work environment had been better, I probably would have stayed. The manager of the activity where I worked was miserable."

A 30-year-old GS-7 personnel assistant who resigned with 9 years of service

Because these specific reasons tend to affect relatively few employees in different agencies, it may be more cost-effective for Federal agencies to pool their resources to address them. Resolution may require the development of new programs or more creative applications of existing programs. Substantive relocation programs might save some employees from resignations forced by the transfer of a spouse or a desire to move to a different town. For example, agencies might wish to cooperate more fully in finding acceptable jobs in new locations for valued employees who are required or who wish to move.

Day care needs—and elder care needs as well—will continue to increase in importance as the Federal work force ages and increasing numbers of women enter and remain in the work place. More extensive and flexible use of job-sharing, part-time employment, extended leaves of absence, flexi-time, and work at home may be attractive options for some of these employees. Tuition or other assistance might be powerful incentives to stay for those Federal employees who wish to continue their education.

"I consistently worked 6 plus days a week and long hours. I refused to continue that kind of schedule after having a baby. [I would have stayed if I had been] permitted to work part-time for several years while my children were small."

An "outstanding" 34-year-old attorney who resigned while earning $68,000 a year

Different Groups of Employees Resign for Different Reasons

In the previous section, we noted that some of the employees who resigned had specific and unique reasons for leaving. It is important to know how the reasons for leaving vary for different groups of resignees so that strategies to reduce unwanted turnover among these groups can focus on the reasons that are most important for each group. Appendix E contains the detailed data on which the discussions in this section are based.

"Outstanding" employees resign for compensation and advancement reasons. It is in the Government's and the general public's interest that the Government be able to retain its most outstanding workers. To most effectively reduce turnover among outstanding employees, it is useful to know why employees rated as "outstanding" resign and to what extent their reasons differ from those employees rated less than outstanding.

In the absence of alternative performance measures of the employees who resigned, we used the performance appraisal ratings that were self-reported on the Exit Survey. Of the employees who resigned, 1,239 reported performance appraisal ratings. There were too few (2 percent) who reported ratings below "fully successful" to include them in the comparisons. The remaining performance appraisal ratings were divided almost equally among the other three rating categories—"outstanding" (30 percent), "exceeds fully successful" (30 percent), and "fully successful" (38 percent).

"In my Federal job I did work far above my grade level and job duties as assigned. I enjoyed my work, but I was frustrated by the inability of the civil service system to reward me for my accomplishments."

An "outstanding" 34-year-old biological technician who resigned after 4 years of service

Table 3 shows that compensation and advancement reasons were particularly important for the resignees who reported "outstanding" performance appraisal ratings. And as the table and figure 1 both show, in comparison to "fully successful" resignees, "outstanding" resignees were slightly more likely to leave to improve career opportunities (10 percent vs. 7 percent), leave because of insufficient pay (11 percent vs. 5 percent), or leave because a spouse was transferred (10 percent vs. 3 percent).

Compensation and advancement issues are particularly important in high-cost areas. A second area of interest is the variation in reasons for leaving by geographic area. For example, do employees in high-cost areas resign for different reasons than employees in other areas? If so, strategies to reduce turnover may need to be sensitive to locality cost differences. Much is already written about how

Table 3.
Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents with Different Performance Appraisal Ratings

Reasons for Resigningby Issue Area	All Resignees (Percent)	PERFORMANCE RATING Outstanding (Percent)	Exceeds Fully Successful (Percent)	Fully Successful (Percent)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	28	34	29	25
(Insufficient pay)	(7)	(11)	(5)	(5)
(Improve career opportunities)	(8)	(10)	(10)	(7)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	17	15	18	17
WORK	15	13	13	15
RELOCATION	15	19	15	14
(Spouse transferred)	(5)	(10)	(5)	(3)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	14	12	15	15
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	9	6	6	11
SUPPORT	2	—	2	2
BENEFITS	1	—	1	1
REORGANIZATION	—	—	—	1
Number of Respondents	1,251	305	313	403

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. A dash (-) refers to a percentage less than one-half of 1 percent. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

difficult it is to retain Federal employees on Federal salaries in high-cost areas.[22]

"I desired to move to a different city to be near family. Los Angeles is a very high cost-of-living area."

A 46-year-old GS-7 editorial assistant with an "outstanding" performance rating who resigned

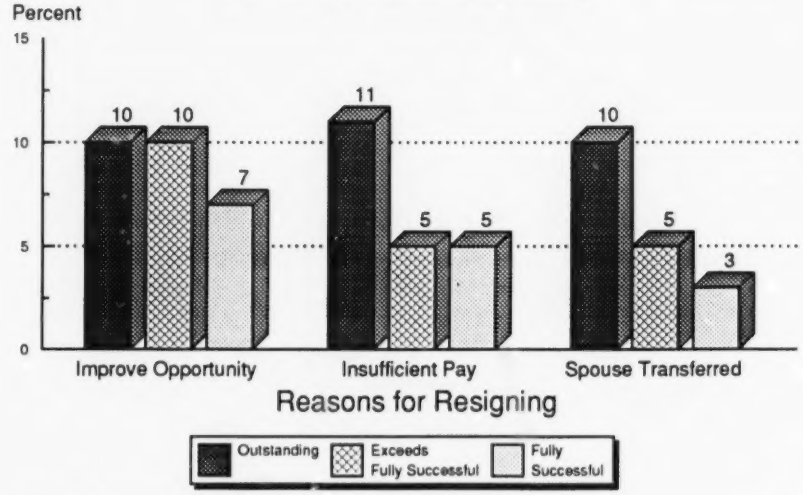
To answer questions about how the reasons for resigning vary by location, we compared the selected high-cost metropolitan areas of Washington, DC, New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco with all other areas. The latter four were grouped together for this survey. Washington, DC, was analyzed separately because it includes the headquarters functions for the Federal agencies participating in this study.

For employees who resigned, compensation and advancement reasons were considerably more important in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and somewhat more important in Washington, DC, than in other locations, as is shown in figure 2. A more detailed analysis of the

[22] Boston Federal Executive Board, "Competing for the Future: A Report on the Effects of Federal Pay Policy on Public Service," Boston, March 1989, pp. i-iii; U.S. Security and Exchange Commission, "Self-Funding Study," a report submitted to the Securities Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, January 1989.

Figure 1. Most Important Reasons for Resigning

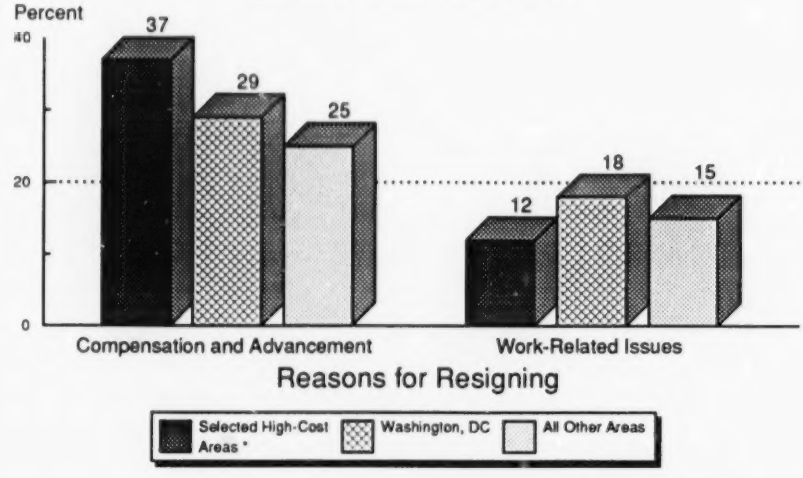
According to Performance Rating



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

Figure 2. Most Important Reasons for Resigning

According to Location of Work



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

* New York, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco

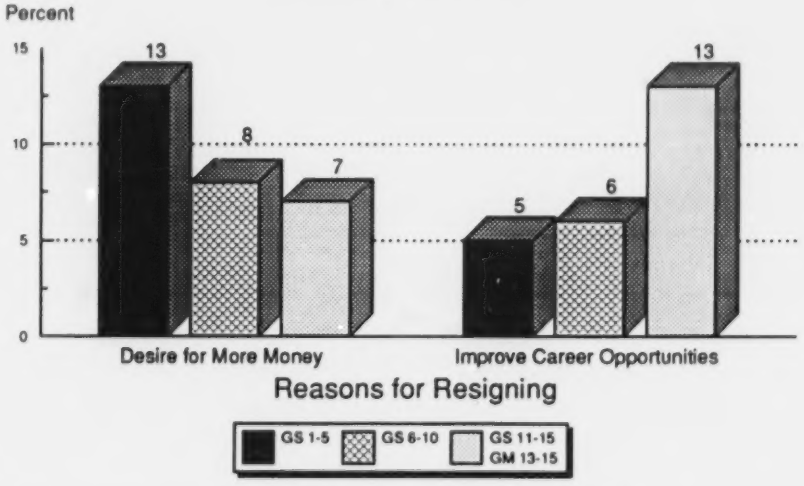
results indicates that the high importance of these reasons in the New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco areas derived from the particularly high frequencies with which respondents from these areas cited the "desire for more money" and "insufficient pay" as the most important reason for leaving. The intermediate (but still high) rating for Washington, DC, was based less on a desire for more money or the insufficiency of pay and more on a particularly high frequency with which that area's resignees cited the "desire to improve career opportunities" as the most important reason for leaving.

It is not clear why employees who resigned in the Washington, DC, area did not cite compensation with the same frequency as employees resigning from other high-cost areas. Possibly, because most agencies have headquarters in the Nation's Capital, Washington, DC, may attract different types of employees. Monetary compensation may also be relatively less important because positions in the Washington, DC, area tend to be graded higher than those "in the field" and Washington, DC, employees earn more—$7,000 on the average—than Federal employees elsewhere.[23] However, if opportunities for advancement are greater in the Washington, DC, area, it is surprising that employees there resigned more frequently to improve their career opportunities than employees in other areas.

Higher graded employees resign to improve career opportunities. A third way of looking at reasons for resigning is by grade level. Respondents in different grades did not differ markedly in the frequencies with which they selected the different issue areas as most important for leaving, except for nonwork and personal interests. This latter issue area was selected less frequently by higher graded than lower graded respondents. Conversely, compared to higher graded employees, lower graded employees were more likely to resign for personal reasons or to

Figure 3. Most Important Reasons for Resigning

According to Grade Level



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

[23] U.S Office of Personnel Management, "Federal Civilian Work Force Statistics: Occupations of Federal White-Collar and Blue-Collar Workers," Sep. 30, 1987, p. 9.

pursue nonwork interests (usually family interests and concerns).

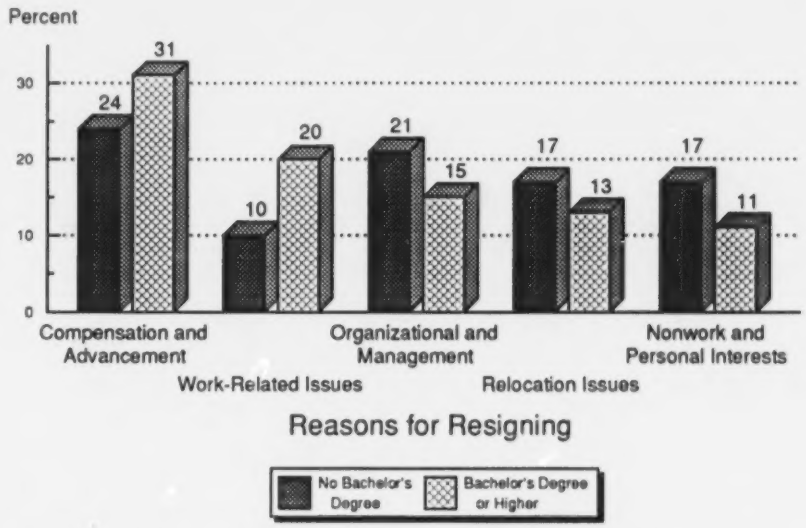
Compensation and advancement reasons were uniformly important at all grade levels, except for a slight decrease in the middle grade range. However, a closer analysis of the grade level differences reveals that two components of the compensation and advancement issue area masked each other's effects. As is shown in figure 3, both the desire for more money and the desire to improve career opportunities varied considerably across grade levels, but in opposite ways. While the desire for more money decreased sharply in importance as grade level increased, the desire to improve career opportunities increased. The remaining two reasons in the issue area varied little or not at all across grade levels.

Highly educated employees resign for compensation reasons or reasons related to their work. In part because resignees who returned the survey were more educated than the resignees who did not return the survey, we examined the ways resignees with more education differed from those with less.

Figure 4 shows that respondents with a Bachelor's degree or higher education were more likely to resign for reasons of compensation or the work itself than respondents with less than a Bachelor's degree. However, respondents with college degrees were *less* likely to resign for reasons related to organizational and management issues, relocation issues, or nonwork and personal interest issues than respondents without these degrees. Consequently, the effectiveness of strategies to reduce turnover among employees of different educational backgrounds may be improved if they focus more specifically on the needs of each group.

Figure 4. Most Important Reasons for Resigning

According to Education Level



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

"You work hard in school and on the job to better yourself, but higher education and productivity are not rewarded individually. I'm tired of seeing people sleeping on the job, abusing leave, and receiving more $$."

"After 22 years, I tried to give my best. I am very good at what I do and am recognized in my professional health field, but this agency and its bureaucratic shuffle do not really and truly care about quality health care. I've had it!!"

A 44-year-old GS-11 nurse who resigned with 22 years' experience and an "outstanding" performance rating

Women were more likely than men to resign for nonwork and personal reasons. With increased numbers of women entering the work force and about two-thirds of the resignees being women, it is useful to see how the reasons for leaving differ between men and women.

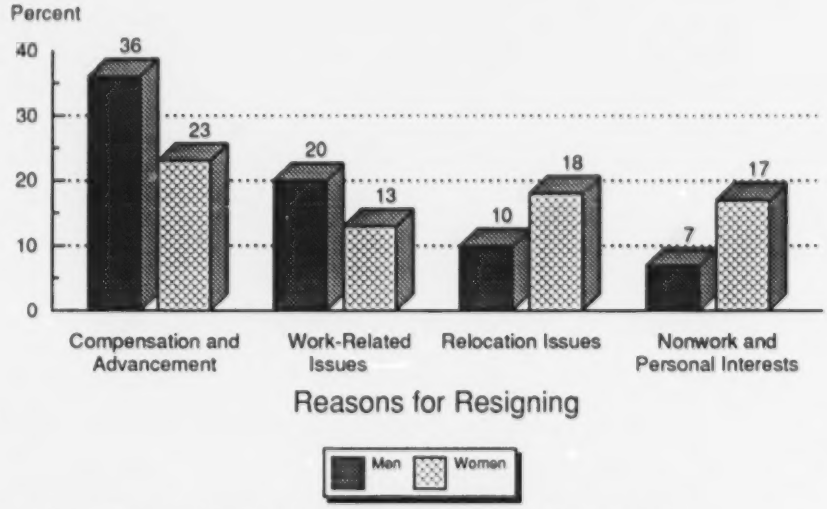
Although compensation and advancement reasons were still the most important, figure 5 shows that these reasons were relatively less important for the women who resigned than for the men. Work-related reasons also played a lesser role for the women. However, women were more likely than men to resign for reasons related to nonwork and personal interests, and women were much more likely to resign because the spouse was transferred. Whatever the reasons, a significant number of women leave the Government long before they earn the full benefit from its retirement program.

A random sample of written comments by women who left for nonwork and personal interest reasons suggested that many left for family reasons —usually to raise or care for young children. More than a few of these women indicated that they would not have resigned if they had been granted their request to work part-time. This suggests that OPM and agencies have an opportunity to make some changes that will accommodate the special needs of these employees better than we are doing now.

Further studies of employees who resign because a spouse was transferred would help answer some of the questions raised about these employees. For example, to what extent do these employees—

Figure 5. Most Important Reasons for Resigning

According to Gender



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

mostly women—return to the Federal work force? Were the spouses who got transferred Federal employees or members of the military? If so, where the transfers mandatory and desired by the individuals involved? Would more accessible and meaningful relocation programs have helped keep valued employees in the Federal work force?

Although there are men willing to quit their jobs to advance a wife's career, in the majority of cases, it is still the wife who sacrifices her job or career to accommodate her husband's.[24] As a group, women employees continue to bear the greater share of family responsibilities and they more frequently resign their jobs—sometimes at great financial cost—to accommodate family concerns.

Satisfied employees resign for reasons related to compensation, relocation, and nonwork and personal interests. In terms of reasons for leaving, the variable that most clearly differentiated any two groups of resignees was level of job satisfaction, as is shown in figure 6. Overall, there were slightly more resignees who were satisfied with their Government job than there were those who were not (44 percent vs. 39 percent). This compares to the 70-percent job satisfaction level of current Federal employees.[25] Thus, although many resignees were satisfied with their Government jobs, resignees, as a group, tended to be much less satisfied with their jobs than their counterparts who remained in the Federal work force.

"The stress was so great that I spent a week in the hospital with chest pains. I thought I had a heart attack. Management becomes so blind to doing a job that they forget that people are human. We are not machines."

A 45-year-old GS-8 computer assistant who resigned for self-employment which would pay a reported $20,000 more than the former Government job

Figure 6. Most Important Reasons for Resigning

According to Level of Job Satisfaction

[24] U.S. Department of Labor, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

[25] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "Working for America: A Federal Employee Survey," report to be published in June 1990.

Employees who were satisfied with their Government jobs left for very different reasons than employees who were not satisfied. Compared to dissatisfied employees, satisfied employees resigned more frequently for reasons related to compensation and advancement, relocation, and nonwork and personal interests. Dissatisfied employees primarily resigned for reasons related to the work itself, poor working relationships, and organizational and management issues. Dissatisfied employees seemed to be escaping what they considered to be undesirable work situations, while satisfied employees seemed to be leaving more for reasons external to their work (e.g., their spouse was transferred) or to pursue nonwork interests.

The reasons dissatisfied employees left merit particular attention and further investigation. For example, to what extent did poor upper level management and employee cooperation and poor use of skills contribute to the dissatisfaction of these employees? How many of these dissatisfied resignees were outstanding workers? Did the sources of their dissatisfaction remain in the Federal work place? Are these sources of dissatisfaction negatively affecting the productivity of the current work force?

Implications of the Reasons for Resigning

The findings indicate that the dynamics of why employees resign are even more complex than was previously thought. Employees left for a larger than expected number of reasons. These reasons emerged on several levels of analysis. First, there were the general reasons that were highly important to most resignees. Then there were secondary reasons that were somewhat important to large numbers of resignees, and finally there were some specific reasons that were extremely important, but for only relatively small groups of resignees.

The most important and general reasons for leaving were clearly reasons related to compensation and advancement. Compensation and advancement issues must be seriously considered in any Government strategy to reduce the unwanted turnover of high-performing Federal employees. These issues will most likely require congressional action for some viable solution.

Besides increasing compensation, particularly at the lower grade levels, the survey results suggest that the Federal Government should reexamine its career paths to determine more closely what career-advancing opportunities are or are not available to its more educated and higher graded employees. Do current regulations and practices unnecessarily restrict career changes and advancement? Have large numbers of employees "plateaued" with little or no hope for further advancement? Can advancement opportunities be found for these employees? Alternatively, if the numbers are such that plateauing is inevitable for a large percentage of the work force, what could be done to make the job or the work environment more rewarding?

Although the secondary reasons for leaving were not as frequently cited as most important for leaving, they were nevertheless important aspects of the decision to leave. Most of these reasons were related to the meaningfulness of the work, good use of one's skills, and a wide variety of organizational and management issues. These reasons can be identified and addressed immediately at the local level by Federal managers and supervisors. Individual managers and supervisors should examine their own agencies and work units to determine how well the skills and expectations of their employees match the requirements of the jobs. How well does upper level management cooperate with its employees? Are the agency's policies and procedures consistent? Is there unnecessary red tape? Are employees treated fairly and recognized for their work accomplishments? Problems in these and related areas cumulatively contribute significantly to the employees' decisions to leave the Federal Government.

Finally, on a third level, there are a number of very specific reasons for leaving that have a disproportionately high impact on small groups of employees. Because these reasons are so specific, however, they are likely to be particularly responsive to focussed remedies. For example, Governmentwide programs to provide education assistance, day care, and relocation assistance, or to allow for more flexible work hours, working at home, job sharing, and conversions to part-time work can be expected to reduce the unwanted turnover among these special resignees.

Cumulatively, these programs can have a substantial effect, not only by reducing unwanted turnover but also by improving the quality of worklife for all Federal employees. Such worklife improvements bolster the attractiveness of the Government as an employer at the same time as they enhance the quality and the productivity of its work force.

RETIREMENTS

Who Retired?

The typical retiree who responded to the survey was 59 years old and had worked for the Government an average of 26 years—24 of those years with the same agency. Thirty-seven percent were in "administrative" jobs and 26 percent were in "professional" jobs, as defined by the PATCO classification system.[26] Many (43 percent) had at least a Bachelor's degree and 36 percent were supervisors.

Most (69 percent) of the employees who retired were male, and 67 percent retired from positions at the higher grade levels—i.e., GS-11 through GS-15. Their average grade was 10.9. Some 37 percent of the retirees were last promoted more than 10 years ago.

"After 43 years of working, I need some time to relax and enjoy myself."

A GS-12 mine safety inspector who retired at 62

As a group, 67 percent of the retirees were satisfied with the jobs they were leaving. This level of job satisfaction is nearly identical to that for employees in the current Federal work force (70 percent).[27] Although retirees as a group were more satisfied with their jobs than resignees, they did not differ from resignees in their likelihood of recommending the Government as an employer (58 percent and 56 percent, respectively).

Many respondents retired as soon as they were eligible, often at a relatively early age. Forty percent of the retirees left within the first year of being eligible to retire and 66 percent left within 2 years of eligibility. Nearly 22 percent of the retirees were 55 years old or younger, 31 percent were less than 57 years old, and 39 percent were younger than 58.

The largest proportion (50 percent) of retirees planned to pursue nonwork interests, usually travel or relaxation. Twenty-three percent planned to work part-time, and only 17 percent reported that they would be working full-time after leaving the Government.

The 170 respondents who planned to work full-time were earning an average annual salary of $50,000 in their Government jobs. At the time they were retiring from the Government, they reported that they would be earning an average annual salary of $54,000 on their new jobs—an increase of about 8 percent.

Compared to resignees, the retirees who planned to work full-time were almost three times more likely (17 percent vs. 6 percent) to increase their salary by more than $20,000. On the other hand, retirees who planned to work full-time were also more likely to take a new job for the same or less money than resignees (44 percent vs. 24 percent). This is not unexpected, since retirees' new salaries are *in addition* to their Federal annuity.

"I have enjoyed my Federal career, but feel it timely to retire."

A GM-15 personnel manager who retired at 61

[26] The PATCO classification system, developed by OPM, groups Federal white-collar occupations into five categories (Professional, Administrative, Technical, Clerical, and Other) based on the subject matter of work, the level of difficulty or responsibility involved, and the educational requirements. For details, see the "Federal Personnel Manual, Supplement 292-1, Book IV," May 1985, pp. 15-16.

[27] U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, "Working for America: A Federal Employee Survey," report to be published in June 1990.

Some 64 percent of the retirees had received performance appraisal ratings of "outstanding" or "exceeds fully successful" and 59 percent had received at least one monetary award in the last 2 years. Most (65 percent) of the retirees thought they would be somewhat or very difficult to replace, and 88 percent thought the Government had made them more marketable. Nevertheless, only 20 percent of the retirees indicated that their managers had made an effort to try to keep them from leaving.

Compared to resignees, slightly fewer retirees were going into private industry (45 percent vs. 52 percent). However, a much larger share of retirees than resignees planned to be self-employed (22 percent vs. 8 percent) after leaving the Government. Twenty-one percent would be working on Government projects in their new jobs. Almost three-fourths (74 percent) of the retirees thought they had been making less money than employees outside Government in comparable positions.

Appendix C includes a detailed description of the characteristics of the retirees in the survey sample.

Why Did Federal Employees Retire?

The employees who retired and returned the Exit Survey left for very different reasons than the employees who resigned. As is shown in table 4, retirees left for two main reasons: concern about changes in the retirement system (20 percent) and desire to pursue nonwork interests (18 percent).

Of the 46 possible reasons for leaving, each of these two reasons was selected as the most important reason for retiring three times more frequently than the next most important reason—too much job stress (6 percent). They also were by far the most frequently selected reason within their respective issue areas, namely the benefits issue area and the nonwork and personal interests issue area.

The frequency with which concern about changes to the retirement system was cited as a reason for leaving may be somewhat higher than usual. That is because Congress was actively debating changes in the lump sum annuity option during the time the survey was being distributed.

"The retirement system is constantly being eroded. Any changes will undoubtedly hurt the retiree. I felt it best to leave before I lost any more."

A 58-year-old retiree

The prominence of nonwork interests as a most important reason for retiring was not unexpected. Its interpretation, however, differs from that for resignees. While the *nonwork* interests of resignees were divided among school (27 percent), homemaking (48 percent), and other (24 percent) activities, retirees planned to devote almost all (83 percent) of their nonwork time to activities *other* than school (1 percent), volunteer work (9 percent), or homemaking (8 percent). Most often, the written comments on the survey indicated that retirees planned to travel or relax.

In addition to concern about changes in the retirement system and the desire to pursue nonwork interests, table 3 shows that retirees frequently cited reasons in the organizational and management area as important reasons for leaving. The 13 reasons in this category collectively received the most weight (26 percent). However, except for too much job stress (6 percent) and unfair promotion practices (4 percent), no reason in this category was selected as the most important reason for leaving by more than 2 percent of the retirees. Nevertheless, the cumulative importance of these types of reasons should not be underestimated by employers of retirement-eligible workers.

The compensation and advancement issue area (11 percent) and the relocation issue area (2 percent), which were so important for employees who resigned, were relatively unimportant for the retirees. Retirees seldom left solely to improve career opportunities (1 percent) or because there were too few opportunities for them in Government (2 percent). Nevertheless, 5 percent of the retirees reported that their most important reason for leaving was the desire for more money, while 3 percent left because the pay was insufficient.

Table 4. Most Important Reasons for Retiring Grouped by Issue Area

BENEFITS ISSUES— 21%

(20)	Concern about changes in the retirement system
(1)	Unsatisfactory retirement benefits
(-)	Unsatisfactory health benefits
(-)	Unsatisfactory leave benefits

NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS ISSUES— 23%

(18)	Desire to pursue nonwork interests
(4)	Personal health problems
(1)	Desire to continue my education
(-)	Difficulties in getting adequate day care
(-)	Unsatisfactory working hours or shifts

ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT ISSUES— 25%

(6)	Too much job stress
(4)	Unfair promotion practices
(2)	Poor cooperation between upper level management and employees
(2)	Organization was becoming too political
(2)	Too little recognition for my work accomplishments
(2)	Poor working relationship with higher level supervisor(s)
(2)	My job duties were not consistent with my grade
(1)	Inconsistent policies or procedures
(1)	Low morale of my work group
(1)	Lack of opportunity to participate in decision making
(1)	Too much red tape
(1)	Poor public image of Federal workers
(1)	Desire to work for another employer

COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT ISSUES— 11%

(5)	Desire to earn more money
(3)	Insufficient pay
(2)	Few opportunities for advancement
(1)	Desire to improve career opportunities

WORK-RELATED ISSUES— 7%

(3)	My job did not make good use of my skills and abilities
(2)	Desire to change to a different type of work
(1)	Desire for more meaningful work
(1)	The work was not meaningful to me
(1)	My job was changed and made less attractive
(-)	Not enough training to do the job well

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS ISSUES— 6%

(3)	Poor working relationship with my immediate supervisor
(2)	Discrimination
(-)	Coworkers did not do their fair share of the work
(-)	Poor working relationship with my coworkers
(-)	Management wanted to fire or demote me

SUPPORT ISSUES— 3%

(1)	Inadequate support; e.g., equipment, supplies, office assistance
(1)	Unsatisfactory working conditions; e.g., space, heat, furniture
(1)	Work group did not have enough trained people to do all the work

RELOCATION ISSUES— 2%

(1)	Desire to move to a different city or town
(1)	Desire to work closer to home
(-)	Spouse was transferred

REORGANIZATION ISSUES— 2%

(1)	My job was being abolished
(1)	My job was being relocated
(-)	Concern about reorganization

Note: This table shows the reasons making up each issue area and, in parentheses, the percentages of employees who selected each reason as the single, most important reason for resigning. Because all percentages are rounded, they do not always total 100 percent or the issue area total. A dash (-) indicates the percentage was less than one-half of 1 percent.

"My job requires that I constantly learn more and newer technology and equipment without any compensation. The stress and pressure became more than I felt I could handle. Management led me to feel that I should have little or no pressure or stress."

A 57-year-old GS-12 electronics technician who was "very satisfied" with his job when he retired

Because retirees so predominantly selected 2 of the 46 reasons as the single most important reason for retiring, the relative importance of other reasons was more difficult to detect. Although other reasons were not selected very frequently as the single most important reason for retiring, they nevertheless were important components in the decision[illegible]e, as evidenced by the large percentages of retirees who rated these secondary reasons at least somewhat important on question 2 of the Exit Survey, as shown in appendix D.

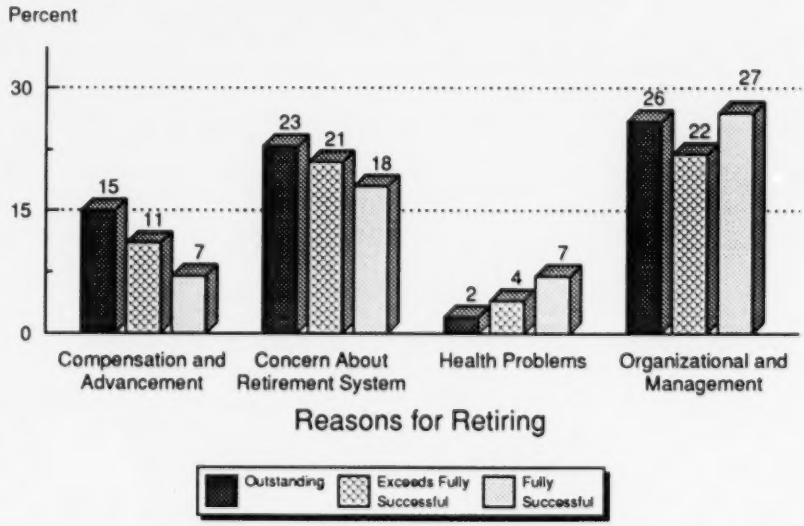
Using the importance ratings on question 2, seven secondary reasons were rated at least somewhat important by over 40 percent of the retirees. These reasons and the percentages of retirees who rated these reasons as at least somewhat important were:

Reason	Percentage of Respondents
Inconsistent policies or procedures	46
Too much job stress	46
Poor cooperation between upper level management and employees	45
Too much red tape	45
Few advancement opportunities	44
Low morale of my work group	42
Unfair promotion practices	41

Nearly all of these reasons were in the organizational and management category. While resignees tended to include personal nonwork needs (e.g., day care) or the desire to move to a different town among their reasons for leaving, retirees

Figure 7. Most Important Reasons for Retiring

According to Performance Rating



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

tended to focus more on issues closely related to the organization, its management practices, the stressfulness of the job, and the morale of the work unit. Adding to the weight of the question 2 responses were written comments of retirees that made frequent references to too much red tape, unfair promotion practices, inconsistent policies and procedures, poor cooperation between upper level management and employees, low morale, and too little recognition for their work contributions.

"There is an unwritten policy here to pressure employees eligible for retirement to retire."

A GS-11 logistics manager who retired with 38 years' experience

Different Groups of Employees Retire for Different Reasons

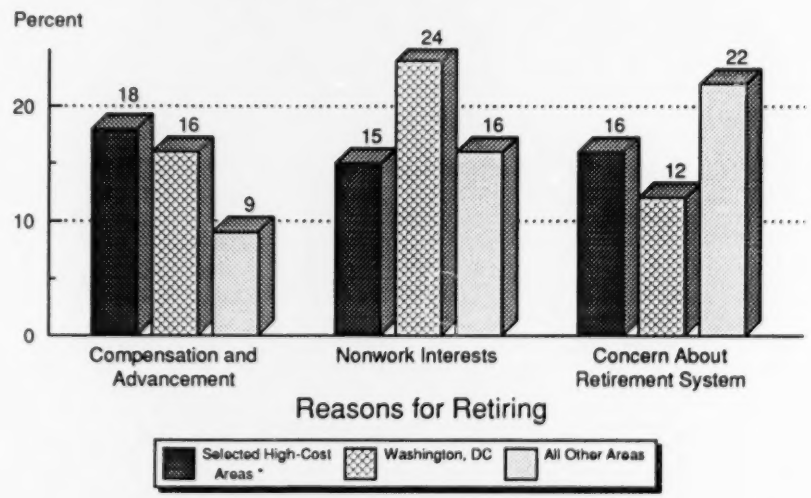
Just as there are group differences in reasons for resigning, so there are group differences in reasons for retiring, although the magnitude of these differences is considerably smaller. Detailed data about these group differences are shown in tabular form in appendix F.

First, reasons for retiring varied by self-reported performance appraisal ratings. Retirees who said they were rated "outstanding" by their supervisors were more likely to leave for compensation and advancement reasons than retirees rated "fully successful" (15 percent vs. 7 percent), as shown in figure 7. "Outstanding" retirees also tended to be slightly more concerned about changes in the retirement system (23 percent vs. 18 percent).

The reasons for retiring also varied by where the retiree worked, as shown in figure 8. Retirees in both Washington, DC, and in the other selected high-cost areas cited compensation and

Figure 8. Most Important Reasons for Retiring

According to Location of Work



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

* New York, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco

advancement reasons about twice as often as retirees from all other areas. Retirees in the high-cost areas, however, were less concerned about the changes in the retirement system (only 12 percent indicated concern in Washington, DC, and 16 percent in the other high-cost areas vs. 22 percent elsewhere). Washington, DC, retirees were most likely to retire to pursue nonwork interests (24 percent compared to 15 for the other high-cost areas and 16 percent elsewhere).

Retirees in the higher grade levels (GS-11 through GS-15) were more concerned about changes in the retirement system than lower graded retirees (GS-5 or lower). They were less concerned with organizational and management issues. As the education level of the retirees increased, the importance of compensation and advancement issues and work-related issues increased, while the importance of organizational and management issues decreased, as is shown in figure 9.

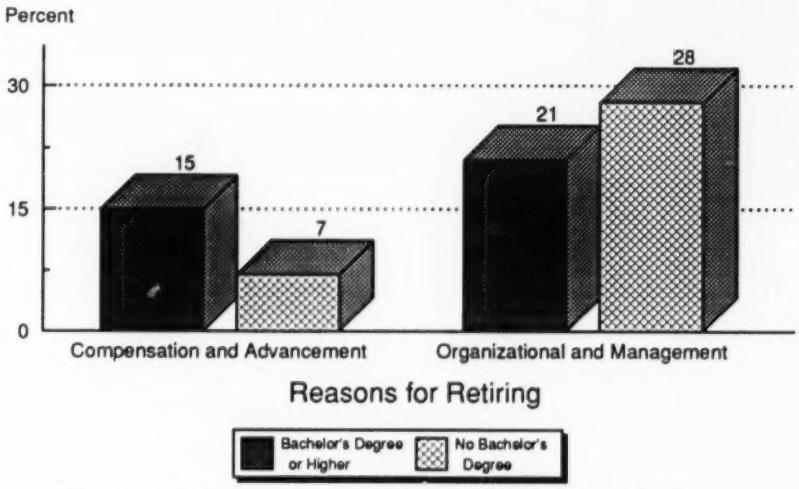
"The system is a disgrace to mankind in that there is a constant fight between the military and civilians. Nothing could be done. The system is bigger than all of us. By all means, never get handicapped and expect to get fair treatment from management, especially military. The system has a way of forcing you out."

A "very dissatisfied" GS-13 aerospace engineer who retired at 56

Women represented only about one-third of the retirees. They differed from male retirees in their less frequent concerns about changes in the retirement system (11 percent vs. 24 percent) and compensation and advancement issues (6 percent vs. 13 percent). The women, however, were more likely to retire for nonwork and personal reasons (31 percent vs. 20 percent), and they selected too much job stress four times more frequently than male retirees (12 percent vs. 3 percent) as the most important reason for retiring. This latter finding may be due, in part, to occupational differences between men and women.

Figure 9. Most Important Reasons for Retiring

According to Education Level



Note: Reasons shown are ones with the more noteworthy comparisons.

About half (48 percent) of the retirees left before the age of 60. This is a relatively early age to leave the work force. Compared to retirees over the age of 60, retirees less than 60 years old more frequently cited compensation and advancement reasons (14 percent vs. 7 percent) and concerns about changes to the retirement system (24 percent vs. 17 percent) as most important reasons for retiring.

Implications of the Reasons for Retiring

As expected, the reasons employees retired were significantly different from the reasons employees resigned. The desires for more money and for better career opportunities were relatively unimportant for retirees, who were primarily concerned about changes in the retirement system and a desire to pursue nonwork interests, such as relaxation or travel.

"This agency's grievance procedure is totally inadequate and is a sham. OPM has become part of the "good old boy system," seriously weakening its oversight responsibilities. The system is not working.

A 60-year-old GS-11 who retired because the "organization was becoming too political"

Given the extent to which concerns about changes in the retirement system figured in the decision to retire, particularly among relatively young retirees, policymakers considering legislation to change the retirement system should ensure that retirement-eligible workers who wish to continue working will not be unduly penalized by the changes. "Grandfather" provisions and "grace periods" are examples of legislative options that may help minimize the impact of any changes, restore confidence in the retirement system, and retain valuable employees longer. Current proposals that would limit cost of living adjustments on annuity payments and that would eliminate the popular lump sum payment option, if enacted, will likely make future retirement benefits less attractive and precipitate an increase in retirements before the changes take effect.

Agency managers may wish to enhance their career counseling and retirement planning capabilities and provide retirement-eligible employees with more attractive inducements for continued service. These inducements might include greater use of reemployed annuitant provisions, trial retirements, contract work which does not violate post-employment regulations, reassignments to different positions, reduced working hours, or alternative work schedules. Creative use of these and other provisions might induce more than a few valued employees to extend their contributions to the Federal public service. Currently, two-thirds of the employees who retired were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their jobs, 40 percent were planning to work at least part-time after retiring, and 31 percent were less than 57 years old.

The secondary organizational and management reasons for which employees retired also warrant further consideration. Many of these reasons relate to issues that are within the control of Federal managers. To the extent that these reasons are driving talented and experienced older workers away, Federal employers may wish to initiate programs specifically designed to help retain and motivate talented older workers.

Shift work is not desirable and especially after 50 years of age. Mid watches are very stressful in terms of sleep cycles. Each person is affected differently. I decided not to do this any longer."

A 55-year-old GS-15 air traffic controller who retired after 30 years' service

To reduce the unwanted turnover of employees who retire unnecessarily early for organizational or management reasons, a greater awareness and consideration of older employees might be required. More flexible use of part-time positions, leaves of absence, variable work hours, job sharing, or assignments to less stressful work might be considered attractive inducements for some retirement-eligible workers. Other retirement-eligible workers may be more receptive to monetary incentives, better use of their skills and abilities, or more recognition for their work contributions. Federal employers may also need to consider new methods of recruiting, training, and retaining older workers. In sum, better ways might be found to enable productive older workers to remain or return

to the Federal work force, without economic penalties and without bureaucratic or institutional barriers.[28] A 1989 national survey of older nonworkers indicated that 24 percent were able and willing to go back to work.[29]

A wide range of issues affecting older workers also deserves the attention of managers. Although retirees generally thought well of their Government experiences and liked their jobs, the relatively high incidents of reports of too much job stress, underutilization of skills, alleged discrimination, and poor working relationships suggest that Federal management practices may not always have adjusted adequately to the needs of the Government's older workers. A recent survey in private industry suggested that older workers were often viewed as more of a nuisance than an asset.[30] Such thinking is not consistent with Federal personnel policy and managers should re-examine their own programs to ensure that older workers are treated fairly, properly recognized for their contributions, and utilized productively.

"There were two main reasons that influenced my decision to leave. For one, I was eligible to retire and the right job offer came along. Secondly, my immediate supervisor was a very poor manager and the office morale was low. I found my services were much desired by the private sector because of my past accomplishments, yet I never received a performance rating above fully successful."

"Nothing could have kept me from leaving, but I must make this one comment. The procurement system at my location leaves much to be desired. As an example, it takes, on the average, 6 months to procure a $25 pen set for a plotting machine that is readily available off the shelf."

A 58-year-old GS-13 electronics engineer who retired and reported to be making $2,000 more in private industry

[28] U.S. Department of Labor, "Older worker task force: Key policy issues for the future," January 1989, pp. 10-11.

[29] Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., A 1989 survey of Americans aged 50 to 64 years old. Cited in the Washington Post's Health magazine, February 1990, p. 18.

[30] Swoboda, Frank, "Survey: Older workers often viewed as burdens," Washington Post, Nov. 30, 1989.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study clearly show that Federal employee turnover is a complex phenomenon and that any attempts to reduce unwanted turnover will need to be multi-faceted. Clearly, employees who resign leave for different reasons than employees who retire. However, within each of these two major groups there are important subgroup differences. If Federal managers wish to reduce unwanted turnover within one of these subgroups, turnover-reduction strategies should be focussed directly on the reasons for leaving that were most prominent within that subgroup. Each agency, therefore, would be well-advised to pinpoint its own turnover problems and to target remedies accordingly.

The survey results emphasize the importance of financial concerns in the decision to leave, both for employees who resigned and for employees who retired. These concerns are more than "pat" or "convenient" ways for employees to explain to managers why they were leaving the Federal public service. They are all too real. In one form or another, monetary issues dominated the reasons for leaving, particularly among the more "outstanding" survey respondents and respondents living in high-cost areas. Unless Federal policymakers and managers seriously address these monetary concerns, many more similarly outstanding Federal employees will unnecessarily and, often reluctantly, leave the public service.

The monetary concerns will not be easily alleviated, particularly not in times of budgetary constraints. However, Federal managers should not delay in seeking remedies for the myriad of secondary reasons for leaving. Although these secondary reasons will not totally offset monetary considerations, many of the employees who left indicated they might have stayed if certain nonmonetary concerns had been appropriately addressed. Many of these concerns are already within the control of Federal managers and remedies are likely to be much less costly than alleviating direct compensation concerns.

It is important to note that any meaningful reductions in the number of employees leaving the Government will require efforts on all levels. In designing strategies to reduce unwanted turnover, Federal managers and policymakers should consider the high costs of turnover and look beyond immediate "quick fixes."

Faced with an aging work force, the Federal Government can not afford to lose large numbers of desirable employees as soon as they become eligible for retirement. Federal managers need to become more fully aware of the issues and concerns of their older workers. Misconceptions about older workers need to be dispelled and strategies need to be developed that will encourage valued older workers to remain in the work force.

Federal managers should also examine more closely how well the skills, abilities, and expectations of their employees match the requirements of the work to be performed. New employees should be recruited and selected because they are the "best and the brightest" for the work to be performed. It is seldom cost-effective for the Government to hire candidates with otherwise outstanding credentials if these credentials are not appropriate for the job to be performed and if valued new employees leave prematurely. Thus, in addition to selecting high-quality candidates for jobs, Federal managers should consider the career expectations of these job candidates and ensure that appropriate career development opportunities are available to minimize their premature departure from the Federal work force.

Appendix A. The MSPB Exit Survey

U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD
Washington, D.C. 20419

Dear Colleague:

We need your help with this survey of people who are leaving full-time permanent jobs with the Federal Government.

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), an independent Federal agency, is conducting a special study of the reasons people leave the Federal civil service. The purpose of this study is to find ways to retain high-quality workers and to improve the overall quality of the Federal work force. The results of this study will be reported to the President, Congress, agency managers, and the general public.

DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT ALL YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE HELD IN STRICT CONFIDENCE.

Please complete and return the questionnaire directly to MSPB in the enclosed postpaid envelope within 5 days after you receive it. It will probably take less than 20 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

If you have any questions, please call Paul van Rijn at (202) 653-7208.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Evangeline W. Swift

Evangeline W. Swift
Director, Policy and Evaluation

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board
EXIT SURVEY

42

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board
EXIT SURVEY

PRIVACY ACT NOTICE

Collection of the requested information is authorized by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. 1205a).

The information you provide will be used to evaluate and improve Federal personnel policies and practices.

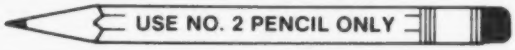
Your participation in this survey is voluntary.

None of the information you choose to supply will be identified with you, and your individual responses will not be seen by anyone in the organization you are leaving.

General Directions: Please read the survey Marking Instructions carefully and answer each question in the way that best reflects your personal opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. Again, all your answers are voluntary.

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

- **Make heavy black marks that completely fill the oval.**
- **Erase any changes cleanly and completely.**
- **Do not make any stray marks in this booklet.**
- **Please do not fold this document.**
- **Answer each question except when directed to skip a section.**
- **Read the questions carefully before selecting an answer.**
- **If you select an answer that is not identified in the list of options, write only in the space provided.**

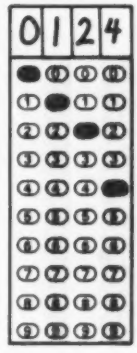


CORRECT MARK:

INCORRECT MARKS:

You will be asked to give numbers for some answers.

EXAMPLE: If your answer is 124



- **Write the number in the boxes, making sure the LAST NUMBER is always placed in the RIGHT-HAND BOX.**
- **Fill in the UNUSED boxes with ZEROES.**
- **Then mark the matching oval below EACH box.**

PART 1 - REASONS FOR LEAVING

1. **Which of the following best describes the personnel action associated with your leaving the Federal Government?** (Please mark **ONE** response.)

   ○ Resignation

   ○ Retirement - disability
   ○ Retirement - nondisability

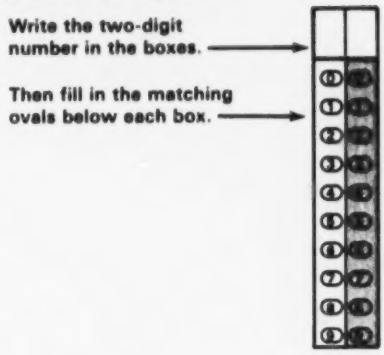
   ○ Separation by the agency for unsatisfactory performance or disciplinary reasons
   ○ Separation by the agency for reasons of RIF, transfer of function, or contracting out

   ○ Don't know
   ○ Other: Please specify →

2. How important was each of the following reasons in your decision to leave your job with the Federal Government?
(Please mark ONE response for EACH reason.)

No.	Reasons for Leaving	1 Not Applicable	2 Not Important	3 Somewhat Important	4 Extremely Important
01.	Desire to pursue nonwork interests	O	O	O	O
02.	Desire to work for another employer	O	O	O	O
03.	Desire to change to a different type of work	O	O	O	O
04.	Desire to earn more money	O	O	O	O
05.	Desire to continue my formal education	O	O	O	O
06.	Desire to move to a different city or town	O	O	O	O
07.	Desire to work closer to home	O	O	O	O
08.	Desire to improve career opportunities	O	O	O	O
09.	Desire for more meaningful work	O	O	O	O
10.	Poor public image of Federal workers	O	O	O	O
11.	Unsatisfactory retirement benefits	O	O	O	O
12.	Unsatisfactory health benefits	O	O	O	O
13.	Unsatisfactory leave benefits	O	O	O	O
14.	Insufficient pay	O	O	O	O
15.	Concern about changes in the retirement system	O	O	O	O
16.	Concern about a reorganization	O	O	O	O
17.	Inconsistent policies or procedures	O	O	O	O
18.	Poor cooperation between upper-level management and employees	O	O	O	O
19.	Organization was becoming too political	O	O	O	O
20.	Unsatisfactory working conditions, e.g., space, heat, furniture	O	O	O	O
21.	Unsatisfactory working hours or shifts	O	O	O	O
22.	Lack of opportunity to participate in decision making	O	O	O	O
23.	Too much red tape	O	O	O	O
24.	Too much job stress	O	O	O	O
25.	Personal health problems	O	O	O	O
26.	Spouse was transferred	O	O	O	O
27.	Difficulties in getting adequate day care	O	O	O	O
28.	Not enough training to do the job well	O	O	O	O
29.	Few opportunities for advancement	O	O	O	O
30.	Unfair promotional practices	O	O	O	O
31.	My job did not make good use of my skills and abilities	O	O	O	O
32.	My job duties were not consistent with my grade	O	O	O	O
33.	The work was not meaningful to me	O	O	O	O
34.	My work was changed and made less attractive	O	O	O	O
35.	My job was being abolished	O	O	O	O
36.	My job was being relocated	O	O	O	O
37.	Management wanted to fire or demote me	O	O	O	O
38.	Inadequate support, e.g., equipment, supplies, office assistance	O	O	O	O
39.	Too little recognition for my work accomplishments	O	O	O	O
40.	Low morale of my work group	O	O	O	O
41.	Work group did not have enough trained people to do all the work	O	O	O	O
42.	Coworkers did not do their fair share of the work	O	O	O	O
43.	Poor working relationship with my coworkers	O	O	O	O
44.	Poor working relationship with my immediate supervisor	O	O	O	O
45.	Poor working relationship with higher-level supervisor(s)	O	O	O	O
46.	Discrimination based on sex, race, age, etc.	O	O	O	O
47.	Other. Please specify → [ ]	O	O	O	O
48.	Other. Please specify → [ ]	O	O	O	O

3a. From the list of Reasons for Leaving, shown in question number 2, select the ONE reason that was <u>most</u> important in your decision to leave. Write its two-digit number code in the boxes to the right and mark the matching oval below EACH box.



3b. In your own words, please explain what made this reason so important. (Please print legibly.)

4. What ONE thing could have been done, if anything, that would have kept you from leaving? (Please write legibly.)

This part asks for general information about the job you are leaving and about what you will be doing after you leave the Government. (Please mark **ONE** response for each question.)

5. To the nearest thousand, what was the yearly pay in the full-time job you are leaving? Write the amount in the boxes below and mark the matching ovals below EACH box.

6. Were you receiving a special pay rate in the job you are leaving?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Don't know

7. Did management try to keep you from leaving the Federal Government?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

8. How does the pay of the job you are leaving compare to that of employees outside the Government who do similar work?

- ○ I was paid much less.
- ○ I was paid somewhat less.
- ○ I was paid about the same.
- ○ I was paid somewhat more.
- ○ I was paid much more.
- ○ Don't know/can't judge

9. Approximately what portion of your household's current total financial support came from the job you are leaving?

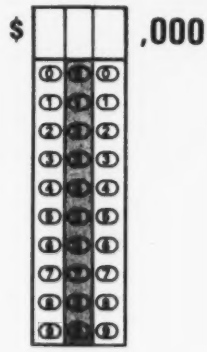
- ○ All or nearly all
- ○ About three-fourths
- ○ About half
- ○ About one-fourth
- ○ Very little

10. Which ONE of the following activities will be your primary activity when you leave the Federal Government?

- ○ Working full-time for pay
- ○ Working part-time for pay
- ○ Going to school
- ○ Volunteer work
- ○ Homemaking
- ○ Other (e.g., traveling, retiring)

11. If you will be working for pay, what do you expect your yearly earnings to be on your new job? To the nearest thousand, write the amount in the boxes below and mark the matching ovals below EACH box.

- ○ I will not be working for pay.



12. If you will be working for pay after you leave the Federal Government, which of the following best describes the type of organization you will be working for?

- ○ I will not be working for pay.

- ○ Federal Government (e.g., re-employed annuitant)
- ○ State or local government
- ○ School, college, or university
- ○ Nonprofit organization
- ○ Private company
- ○ Self-employed
- ○ Don't know/Other

13. To what extent have your experiences with the Federal Government made you more marketable (sought after) outside the Government?

- ○ To a very great extent
- ○ To a considerable extent
- ○ To some extent
- ○ To a little extent
- ○ To no extent
- ○ Don't know/can't judge

46

14. If you will be working for pay after you leave the Government, will you be working on any projects for the Federal Government?

- ○ I will not be working.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Don't know

15. How difficult do you think it will be for your supervisor to fill the position you are leaving with a qualified candidate?

- ○ The position I am leaving is not being filled.

- ○ Not difficult
- ○ Somewhat difficult
- ○ Very difficult

16. In general, how satisfied were you with the job you are leaving?

- ○ Very satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ○ Dissatisfied
- ○ Very dissatisfied

17. In general, how satisfied were you with the Federal Government as an employer?

- ○ Very satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ○ Dissatisfied
- ○ Very dissatisfied

PART J - PERSONAL BACKGROUND

18. What agency do you work for?

- ① Agriculture
- ② Commerce

- ③ Air Force
- ④ Army
- ⑤ Navy
- ⑥ Other DOD

- ⑦ Education
- ⑧ Energy
- ⑨ Environmental Protection Agency
- ⑩ General Services Administration
- ⑪ Health and Human Services

- ⑫ Housing and Urban Development
- ⑬ Interior
- ⑭ Justice
- ⑮ Labor
- ⑯ NASA

- ⑰ Office of Personnel Management
- ⑱ Small Business Administration
- ⑲ State
- ⑳ Transportation
- ㉑ Treasury

- ㉒ Veterans Affairs
- ㉓ Other

19. Where did you work?

- ○ Washington, DC metropolitan area
- ○ New York, Boston, Los Angeles, or San Francisco metropolitan area
- ○ Other

20. How long have you worked for your <u>agency</u> (excluding military service)? Write the <u>total</u> number of years in the boxes below and mark the matching ovals below EACH box.

21. **How long have you worked for the Federal Government (excluding military service)? Write the total number of years in the boxes below and mark the matching ovals below EACH box.**

22. **What is your sex?**

- ○ Male
- ○ Female

23. **What is your race/national origin?**

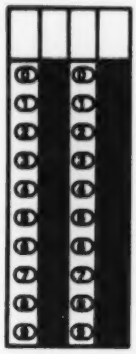
- ○ White, not Hispanic
- ○ Black, not Hispanic
- ○ Hispanic
- ○ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- ○ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ○ Other

24. **What is your age? Write the number of years in the boxes below and mark the matching ovals below EACH box.**

25. **What was your pay plan?**

- ○ GS
- ○ GM
- ○ VM, VN, VP or other Title 38 pay plan
- ○ FP or other Foreign Service pay plan
- ○ WG or other blue-collar pay plan
- ○ Don't know
- ○ Other: Please specify →

26. **Write your job series number in the four boxes below and mark the matching ovals below EACH box. If your job series number is less than four digits, put zeroes before the number. For example, 0334 for Computer Specialist or 0085 for Guard.**



If you are not sure about your job series number, please check your personnel records or ask your personnel officer.

If you are still unsure, write your job title in the space that follows:

Job Title:

27. **What was your pay grade (or GS equivalent)?**

○ 1	○ 6	○ 11	○ 16
○ 2	○ 7	○ 12	○ 17
○ 3	○ 8	○ 13	○ 18
○ 4	○ 9	○ 14	○ Don't Know
○ 5	○ 10	○ 15	

28. **Were you a supervisor (i.e., did you sign performance appraisals for other employees)?**

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

29. **What performance rating (or equivalent) did you receive within the last year?**

- ○ Outstanding
- ○ Exceeds fully successful
- ○ Fully successful
- ○ Minimally successful
- ○ Unacceptable
- ○ Did not receive a performance rating
- ○ Don't know

30. **In the last 2 years, how many monetary awards (e.g., Special Achievements, Performance Awards, Quality Step Increases) have you received for your job performance?**

- ○ None
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ More than 2

48

31. How long has it been since your last promotion?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-2 years
- ○ 3-4 years
- ○ 5-6 years
- ○ 7-10 years
- ○ More than 10 years

32. What is your highest education level?

- ○ Less than high school diploma
- ○ High school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED)
- ○ High school diploma or GED plus some college or technical training
- ○ Associate's degree
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Some graduate school
- ○ Graduate or professional degree

33. What is your Federal retirement system?

- ○ Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS)
- ○ Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)
- ○ Don't know

34. If you are retiring, how long have you been eligible to retire?

- ○ I am not retiring.

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-2 years
- ○ 3-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ More than 10 years

35. In the last year, for how many different jobs (Federal and non-Federal) did you apply?

- ○ None
- ○ 1
- ○ 2-5
- ○ 6-10
- ○ More than 10

36. If possible, would you work for the Federal Government again?

- ○ Yes
- ○ Maybe
- ○ No

37. Do you recommend working for the Federal Government to your friends?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

---

38. Use the space below for any additional comments or suggestions you might have.

This completes the survey. Please use the enclosed postage-paid envelope to return the survey. Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix B. Federal Departments and Agencies Participating in the Survey

Table B1.
Executive Branch Departments and Agencies Participating in the Exit Survey

Participating Departments and Agencies	Percent of the Federal Work Force[1]	Number of Participating Personnel Offices	Number of Surveys Returned
Agriculture	6	8	199
Air Force	10	11	237
Army	17	23	305
Commerce	2	9	63
Defense	5	8	114
Education	—	1	28
Energy	1	3	36
Environmental Protection Agency	1	3	18
General Services Agency	1	2	16
Health and Human Services	7	5	230
Housing and Urban Development	1	3	18
Interior	3	16	91
Justice	3	12	124
Labor	1	7	59
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	1	3	68
Navy	13	24	306
Office of Personnel Management	—	7	46
Small Business Administration	—	1	17
State	—	1	26
Transportation	4	5	135
Treasury	9	13	171
Veterans Affairs	11	33	281
Unknown	n/a	n/a	190
Total	96	198	2,778

Note: A dash (—) refers to a percentage less than one-half of 1 percent. The participating personnel offices were offices with Office of Personnel Management numbers (i.e., Personnel Office Indicators or Servicing Office Numbers). The Exit Survey was often distributed through satellite offices. The 198 participating personnel offices service about one-third of the Federal work force and reflect the organizational diversity of the Federal agencies participating in the survey.

[1] *Source: Central Personnel Data File, 1987*

Appendix C. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Table C1. Profiles of Survey Respondents

RESIGNEES		RETIREES	
No. Selected Survey Questions	Percent	No. Selected Survey Questions	Percent
22. FEMALES	66	22. FEMALES	31
24. YEARS OF AGE (Average)	(35)	24. YEARS OF AGE (Average)	(59)
21. YEARS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE (Average)	(6)	21. YEARS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE (Average)	(26)
26. PATCO GROUPS (derived from job series)		26. PATCO GROUPS (derived from job series)	
Professional	27	Professional	26
Administrative	19	Administrative	37
Technical/Clerical/Others	53	Technical/Clerical/Others	37
27. GRADE LEVEL (Average)	(7.6)	27. GRADE LEVEL (Average)	(10.9)
GS 1-5	38	GS 1-5	9
GS 6-10	33	GS 6-10	24
GS 11-15	29	GS 11-15	67
32. EDUCATION LEVEL		32. EDUCATION LEVEL	
No Bachelor's Degree	49	No Bachelor's Degree	57
Bachelor's Degree or higher	51	Bachelor's Degree or higher	43
29. PERFORMANCE RATING		29. PERFORMANCE RATING	
Fully Successful (FS)	38	Fully Successful (FS)	35
Outstanding/Exceeds FS	60	Outstanding/Exceeds FS	64
19. LOCATION OF WORK		19. LOCATION OF WORK	
Washington, DC	20	Washington, DC	18
NY-Boston-LA-SF	16	NY-Boston-LA-SF	9
Other	64	Other	73
16. JOB SATISFACTION		16. JOB SATISFACTION	
Very Dissatisfied/Dissatisfied	39	Very Dissatisfied/Dissatisfied	18
Very Satisfied/Satisfied	44	Very Satisfied/Satisfied	67
37. RECOMMEND GOVERNMENT—Yes	56	37. RECOMMEND GOVERNMENT—yes	58
28. SUPERVISOR—yes	10	13. MADE MORE MARKETABLE	88
10. ACTIVITY AFTER LEAVING		14. WORKING ON GOVERNMENT PROJECTS	21
Working full-time	71	28. SUPERVISOR—yes	36
Working part-time	6	30. ONE OR MORE MONETARY AWARDS	59
School	6	31. LAST PROMOTION-MORE THAN 10 YEARS AGO	37
Homemaking	11	34. ELIGIBLE TO RETIRE	
Others	6	Less than 1 year	40
14. WORKING ON GOVERNMENT PROJECTS	15	1-2 years	26
15. VERY DIFFICULT TO REPLACE	23	10. ACTIVITY AFTER LEAVING	
13. MADE MORE MARKETABLE	81	Working full-time	17
35. JOB APPLICATIONS MADE—none	34	Working part-time	23
6. ON SPECIAL PAY RATE	19	Homemaking	5
30. ONE OR MORE MONETARY AWARDS	48	Volunteer work	5
8. PAID LESS THAN IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY	74	Others	50
31. PROMOTION WITHIN THE LAST YEAR	42		
(Based on 1,510 respondents who resigned.)		*(Based on 1,029 respondents who retired.)*	

Note: Because of rounding and because not all items are always shown, percentages may not total 100.
See the Exit Survey in appendix A for more details about the survey questions on which these profiles are based.

Appendix D. Importance Ratings: Reasons for Resigning and Retiring

This appendix contains detailed information about the responses to question 2 of the Exit Survey. While question 3a of the Exit survey asked respondents about the single most important reason they were leaving, question 2 asked respondents to indicate how important each of the 46 listed reasons was in their decision to leave.

The reasons for leaving are rank ordered according to their average, weighted importance score. This importance score was averaged over all respondents and was weighted according to the number of reasons that were rated important by each respondent. This weighting distinguishes among importance ratings made by respondents who rated only a few reasons as important and those made by respondents who rated many reasons as important.

The reasons for leaving are shown in an abbreviated form. The exact wording of each reason for leaving may be found in the facsimile of the Exit Survey in appendix A.

Table D1.
Reasons Federal Employees Resigned: Ratings of Importance

Weighted Score Rank	Reason for Resigning (abbreviated)	Average Weighted Importance Score	Percent Not Applicable	Percent Not Important	Percent Somewhat Important	Percent Extremely Important	Number of Importance Ratings
1	Improve career opportunities	5.29	24	9	19	50	1,027
2	More money	4.80	23	15	22	41	948
3	Few advancement opportunities	4.33	23	12	24	41	980
4	Insufficient pay	4.30	24	16	23	36	896
5	More meaningful work	4.04	26	14	23	37	899
6	Different town	3.79	57	18	9	17	390
7	Nonwork interests	3.63	56	17	13	15	417
8	Poor cooperation between managers/employees	3.50	24	16	24	36	908
9	Poor use of my skills	3.40	30	16	21	34	822
10	Low morale in work group	3.32	28	14	25	33	877
11	Different work	3.10	33	22	22	23	670
12	Inconsistent policies/procedures	2.97	26	19	26	29	832
13	New employer	2.82	32	22	22	24	692
14	Too much job stress	2.80	26	29	20	25	686
15	Duties inconsistent with my grade	2.77	31	22	20	27	713
16	Too little recognition	2.76	33	16	22	29	769
17	Unfair promotion practices	2.69	32	21	17	30	812
18	Too much red tape	2.64	29	22	25	24	740
19	Not enough people to do the work	2.50	38	19	21	22	654
20	Work closer to home	2.43	51	23	12	14	388
21	Spouse was transferred	2.37	83	9	1	7	122
22	Continue education	2.34	50	20	15	16	559
23	Little participation in decision making	2.18	31	23	26	20	689
24	Organization too political	2.16	34	25	20	21	621
25	Work not meaningful to me	2.12	40	22	19	19	573
26	Unsatisfactory working conditions	1.85	35	29	21	14	537
27	Coworkers did not do fair share	1.68	45	22	16	17	491
28	Inadequate office support	1.57	50	18	18	13	472
29	Poor public image	1.46	38	31	18	13	464
30	Unsatisfactory health benefits	1.36	43	32	15	10	385
31	Unsatisfactory working hours/shifts	1.36	45	36	10	10	301
32	Poor relationship with supervisor	1.34	56	19	12	14	384
33	Poor relationship with managers	1.32	53	20	12	15	405
34	Personal health problems	1.20	67	22	6	6	171
35	Problems getting day care	1.18	80	11	3	6	137
36	Discrimination	1.15	65	14	7	13	309
37	Concern about retirement system	1.08	43	36	13	8	315
38	Not enough training to do job	1.03	57	22	12	9	319
39	Work was made less attractive	1.02	56	23	9	11	308
40	Concern about reorganization	.90	46	34	13	7	297
41	Unsatisfactory retirement benefits	.86	47	34	13	6	286
42	Poor relationships with coworkers	.58	64	24	8	5	189
43	Unsatisfactory leave benefits	.46	47	42	8	4	167
44	Management wanted to fire/demote me	.43	88	7	2	4	79
45	Job was being relocated	.28	88	9	1	2	39
46	Job was being abolished	.25	87	10	1	2	53

Appendix D

Table D2.
Reasons Federal Employees Retired: Ratings of Importance

Weighted Score Rank	Reason for Retiring (abbreviated)	Average Weighted Importance Score	Percent Not Applicable	Percent Not Important	Percent Somewhat Important	Percent Extremely Important	Number of Importance Ratings
1	Nonwork interests	9.82	38	15	27	21	492
2	Concern about retirement system	9.46	35	9	21	37	587
3	Too much job stress	5.13	35	19	24	22	475
4	Few advancement opportunities	3.99	44	12	19	25	454
5	Inconsistent policies/procedures	3.72	40	13	22	24	481
6	Too much red tape	3.49	40	16	27	18	458
7	Personal health problems	3.46	67	16	11	7	183
8	Poor cooperation between managers/employees	3.46	41	14	20	25	467
9	Unfair promotion practices	3.31	47	13	15	26	416
10	Low morale in work group	3.25	46	11	19	23	435
11	Too little recognition	3.04	47	14	18	21	407
12	Organization too political	3.01	46	16	18	21	393
13	Not enough people to do the work	2.74	51	13	20	16	371
14	Insufficient pay	2.52	54	16	16	14	310
15	Poor use of my skills	2.34	51	16	17	16	341
16	Duties inconsistent with my grade	2.28	52	16	16	16	330
17	Little participation in decision-making	2.24	46	20	22	13	356
18	More money	2.22	57	20	13	10	235
19	Different town	2.11	76	13	7	5	116
20	Poor public image	2.02	53	20	17	10	278
21	Poor relationship with managers	1.78	61	14	11	14	257
22	Work was made less attractive	1.65	63	15	12	11	231
23	Different work	1.65	60	21	12	7	195
24	Unsatisfactory working conditions	1.65	53	24	13	10	235
25	Discrimination	1.54	70	11	6	13	200
26	More meaningful work	1.48	64	15	12	9	220
27	Concern about reorganization	1.48	57	22	14	7	218
28	Poor relationship with supervisor	1.41	66	15	8	11	192
29	New employer	1.40	60	22	12	6	185
30	Work not meaningful to me	1.38	62	19	11	9	200
31	Inadequate office support	1.32	63	14	12	9	214
32	Coworkers did not do fair share	1.24	62	19	11	8	190
33	Unsatisfactory retirement benefits	1.10	67	17	10	6	166
34	Improve career opportunities	1.05	70	16	9	5	150
35	Unsatisfactory health benefits	1.02	68	19	9	5	151
36	Work closer to home	.89	77	14	5	3	86
37	Unsatisfactory working hours/shifts	.72	65	26	5	4	101
38	Job was being abolished	.52	89	7	2	2	39
39	Not enough training to do job	.52	78	14	6	4	104
40	Continue education	.43	77	17	4	1	56
41	Poor relationships with coworkers	.36	78	16	4	2	67
42	Job was being relocated	.29	91	6	1	2	28
43	Management wanted to fire/demote me	.24	92	5	1	2	33
44	Unsatisfactory leave benefits	.23	72	24	2	2	42
45	Spouse was transferred	.09	95	5	—	—	4
46	Problems getting day care	.01	95	5	—	—	2

Appendix E. Reasons for Resigning: Differences by Selected Groups

This appendix includes detailed tabular information about the differences in the frequencies with which different groups of resignees selected different reasons as most important in their decision to resign.

All data in these tables are based on responses to question 3a of the Exit Survey. The reasons for leaving that make up and define each issue area are shown in table 2 of this report.

Table E1.
Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents From Different Geographic Locations

		GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION		
Reasons for Resigning by Issue Area	All Resignees (Percent)	Washington DC (Percent)	New York Boston Los Angeles San Francisco (Percent)	All Other Areas (Percent)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	28	29	37	25
(More money)	(10)	(7)	(16)	(9)
(Insufficient pay)	(7)	(6)	(11)	(6)
(Improve career opportunities)	(8)	(13)	(8)	(6)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	17	15	16	17
WORK	15	18	12	15
RELOCATION	15	14	13	16
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	14	12	12	15
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	9	11	7	9
SUPPORT	2	1	3	2
BENEFITS	1	—	2	1
REORGANIZATION	—	—	1	—
Number of Respondents	1,251	256	200	770

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. A dash (-) refers to a percentage less than one-half of 1 percent. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Appendix E

Table E2.
Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents at Different Grade Levels

Reasons for Resigning by Issue Area	All Resignees (Percent)	GRADE LEVEL GS-1 through GS-5 (Percent)	GS-6 through GS-10 (Percent)	GS-11 through GS-15 (Percent)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	28	29	25	30
(More money)	(10)	(13)	(8)	(7)
(Improve career opportunities)	(8)	(5)	(6)	(13)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	17	16	19	16
WORK	15	14	15	18
RELOCATION	15	14	16	15
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	14	16	15	10
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	9	9	9	9
SUPPORT	2	1	2	2
BENEFITS	1	1	1	—
REORGANIZATION	—	—	1	—
Number of Respondents	1,251	451	400	353

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. A dash (-) refers to a percentage less than one-half of 1 percent. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Table E3.
Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents With Different Levels of Education

Reasons for Resigning by Issue Area	All Resignees (Percent)	EDUCATION LEVEL: No Bachelor's Degree (Percent)	EDUCATION LEVEL: Bachelor's Degree or Higher (Percent)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	28	24	31
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	17	21	15
WORK	15	10	20
RELOCATION	15	17	13
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	14	17	11
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	9	9	9
SUPPORT	2	1	2
BENEFITS	1	1	—
REORGANIZATION	—	—	—
Number of Respondents	1,251	599	647

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. A dash (—) refers to a percentage less than one-half of 1 percent.

Appendix E

Table E4.
Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Male and Female Respondents

Reasons for Resigning by Issue Area	All Resignees (Percent)	GENDER Male (Percent)	GENDER Female (Percent)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	28	36	23
(Improve career opportunities)	(8)	(11)	(6)
(Insufficient pay)	(7)	(11)	(4)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	17	17	16
WORK	15	20	13
(Poor use of my skills)			
RELOCATION	15	10	18
(Spouse was transferred)	(5)	(1)	(7)
(Desire to move)	(7)	(6)	(8)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	14	7	17
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	9	8	10
SUPPORT	2	2	2
BENEFITS	1	1	1
REORGANIZATION	—	—	—
Number of Respondents	1,251	424	809

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. A dash (—) refers to a percentage less than one-half of 1 percent. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Table E5.
Most Important Reasons for Resigning: Respondents With Different Levels of Job Satisfaction

Reasons for Resigning by Issue Area	All Resignees (Percent)	LEVEL OF JOB SATISFACTION: Satisfied/Very Satisfied (Percent)	LEVEL OF JOB SATISFACTION: Dissatisfied/ Very Dissatisfied (Percent)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	28	30	23
(Improve career opportunities)	(8)	(9)	(7)
(Insufficient pay)	(7)	(8)	(5)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	17	12	22
WORK	15	6	26
(Poor use of my skills)	(6)	(1)	(13)
RELOCATION	15	24	5
(Spouse was transferred)	(5)	(9)	(1)
(Desire to move)	(7)	(11)	(3)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	14	19	8
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	9	6	13
SUPPORT	2	1	3
BENEFITS	1	1	—
REORGANIZATION	—	—	—
Number of Respondents	1,251	536	480

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. A dash (—) refers to a percentage less than one-half of 1 percent. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Appendix F. Reasons for Retiring: Differences by Selected Groups

This appendix includes detailed tabular information about the differences in the frequencies with which different groups of retirees selected different reasons as most important in their decision to retire.

All data in these tables are based on responses to question 3a of the Exit Survey. The reasons for leaving that make up and define each issue area are shown in table 2 of this report.

Table F1.
Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents With Different Performance Appraisal Ratings

Reasons for Retiring by Issue Area	All Retirees (Percent)	PERFORMANCE RATING: Outstanding (Percent)	Exceeds Fully Successful (Percent)	Fully Successful (Percent)
BENEFITS	21	23	22	20
(Concern about changes in retirement)	(20)	(23)	(21)	(18)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	23	20	24	25
(Desire to pursue nonwork interests)	(18)	(18)	(19)	(17)
(Health problems)	(4)	(2)	(4)	(7)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	25	26	22	27
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	11	15	11	7
(Insufficient pay)	(3)	(5)	(2)	(2)
(More money)	(5)	(6)	(5)	(4)
(Few opportunities)	(2)	(4)	(2)	(1)
WORK	7	4	9	7
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	6	5	7	6
SUPPORT	3	4	2	3
RELOCATION	2	2	3	2
REORGANIZATION	2	1	1	3
Number of Respondents	782	191	287	263

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Table F2.
Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents From Different Geographic Locations

Reasons for Retiring by Issue Area	All Retirees (Percent)	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION: Washington DC (Percent)	New York Boston Los Angeles San Francisco (Percent)	All Other Areas (Percent)
BENEFITS	21	12	18	23
(Concern about changes in retirement)	(20)	(12)	(16)	(22)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	23	26	18	23
(Desire to pursue nonwork interests)	(18)	(24)	(15)	(16)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	25	25	26	24
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	11	16	18	9
(More money)	(5)	(8)	(8)	(4)
(Insufficient pay)	(3)	(5)	(8)	(2)
WORK	7	9	1	7
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	6	5	5	7
SUPPORT	3	3	5	3
RELOCATION	2	2	4	2
REORGANIZATION	2	1	5	2
Number of Respondents	782	130	74	556

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Appendix F

Table F3.
Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents at Different Grade Levels

Reasons for Retiring by Issue Area	All Retirees (Percent)	GRADE LEVEL: GS-1 through GS-5 (Percent)	GS-6 through GS-10 (Percent)	GS-11 through GS-15 (Percent)
BENEFITS	21	12	16	24
(Concern about changes in retirement)	(20)	(10)	(15)	(23)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	23	25	30	21
(Desire to pursue nonwork interests)	(18)	(15)	(23)	(17)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	25	35	27	23
(Poor cooperation between upper management/employees)	(2)	(1)	(1)	(3)
(Too much job stress)	(6)	(10)	(10)	(4)
(Organization too political)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(3)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	11	12	7	10
WORK	7	1	4	8
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	6	7	7	6
SUPPORT	3	3	5	3
RELOCATION	2	3	2	3
REORGANIZATION	2	3	3	2
Number of Respondents	782	69	177	509

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

62

Table F4.
Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents With Different Levels of Education

Reasons for Retiring by Issue Area	All Retirees (Percent)	EDUCATION LEVEL: No Bachelor's Degree (Percent)	EDUCATION LEVEL: Bachelor's Degree or Higher (Percent)
BENEFITS	21	22	19
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	23	24	22
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	25	28	21
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	11	7	15
WORK	7	5	9
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	6	6	7
SUPPORT	3	4	3
RELOCATION	2	2	3
REORGANIZATION	2	2	1
Number of Respondents	782	442	335

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving.

Appendix F

Table F5.
Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Male and Female Respondents

Reasons for Retiring by Issue Area	All Retirees (Percent)	GENDER Male (Percent)	GENDER Female (Percent)
BENEFITS	21	25	11
(Concern about changes in retirement)	(20)	(24)	(11)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	23	20	31
(Desire to pursue nonwork interests)	(18)	(15)	(24)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	25	23	29
(Too much job stress)	(6)	(3)	(12)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	11	13	6
(Insufficient pay)	(3)	(3)	(2)
(More money)	(5)	(6)	(2)
WORK	7	8	5
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	6	5	9
SUPPORT	3	2	5
RELOCATION	2	3	2
REORGANIZATION	2	2	2
Number of Respondents	782	535	233

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Table F6.
Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents With Different Levels of Job Satisfaction

Reasons for Retiring by Issue Area	All Retirees (Percent)	LEVEL OF JOB SATISFACTION: Satisfied/ Very Satisfied (Percent)	LEVEL OF JOB SATISFACTION: Dissatisfied/ Very Dissatisfied (Percent)
BENEFITS	21	23	12
(Concern about changes in retirement)	(20)	(22)	(11)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	23	27	9
(Desire to pursue nonwork interests)	(18)	(22)	(5)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	25	21	36
(Too much job stress)	(6)	(5)	(7)
(Organization too political)	(2)	(1)	(7)
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	11	11	11
(Insufficient pay)	(3)	(3)	(4)
(More money)	(5)	(6)	(2)
WORK	7	5	12
(Poor use of my skills)	(3)	(1)	(7)
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	6	5	13
SUPPORT	3	3	5
RELOCATION	2	3	2
REORGANIZATION	2	2	1
Number of Respondents	782	515	139

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

Appendix F

Table F7.
Most Important Reasons for Retiring: Respondents in Different Age Groups

Reasons for Retiring by Issue Area	All Retirees (Percent)	AGE GROUP 50-59 years (Percent)	AGE GROUP 60-69 years (Percent)
BENEFITS	21	24	18
(Concern about changes in retirement)	(20)	(24)	(17)
NONWORK and PERSONAL INTERESTS	23	17	29
(Desire to pursue nonwork interests)	(18)	(14)	(22)
ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT	25	26	23
COMPENSATION and ADVANCEMENT	11	14	7
(More money)	(5)	(7)	(3)
(Insufficient pay)	(3)	(4)	(2)
WORK	7	8	6
WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	6	4	9
SUPPORT	3	2	4
RELOCATION	2	3	2
REORGANIZATION	2	3	1
Number of Respondents	782	370	372

Note: Percentages (rounded) show the share of respondents in each group who selected the reasons in each issue area as the single "most important" reason for leaving. Entries in parentheses are reasons that particularly highlight the group comparisons.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

67

A Report to the President
and the Congress of the United States
by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board